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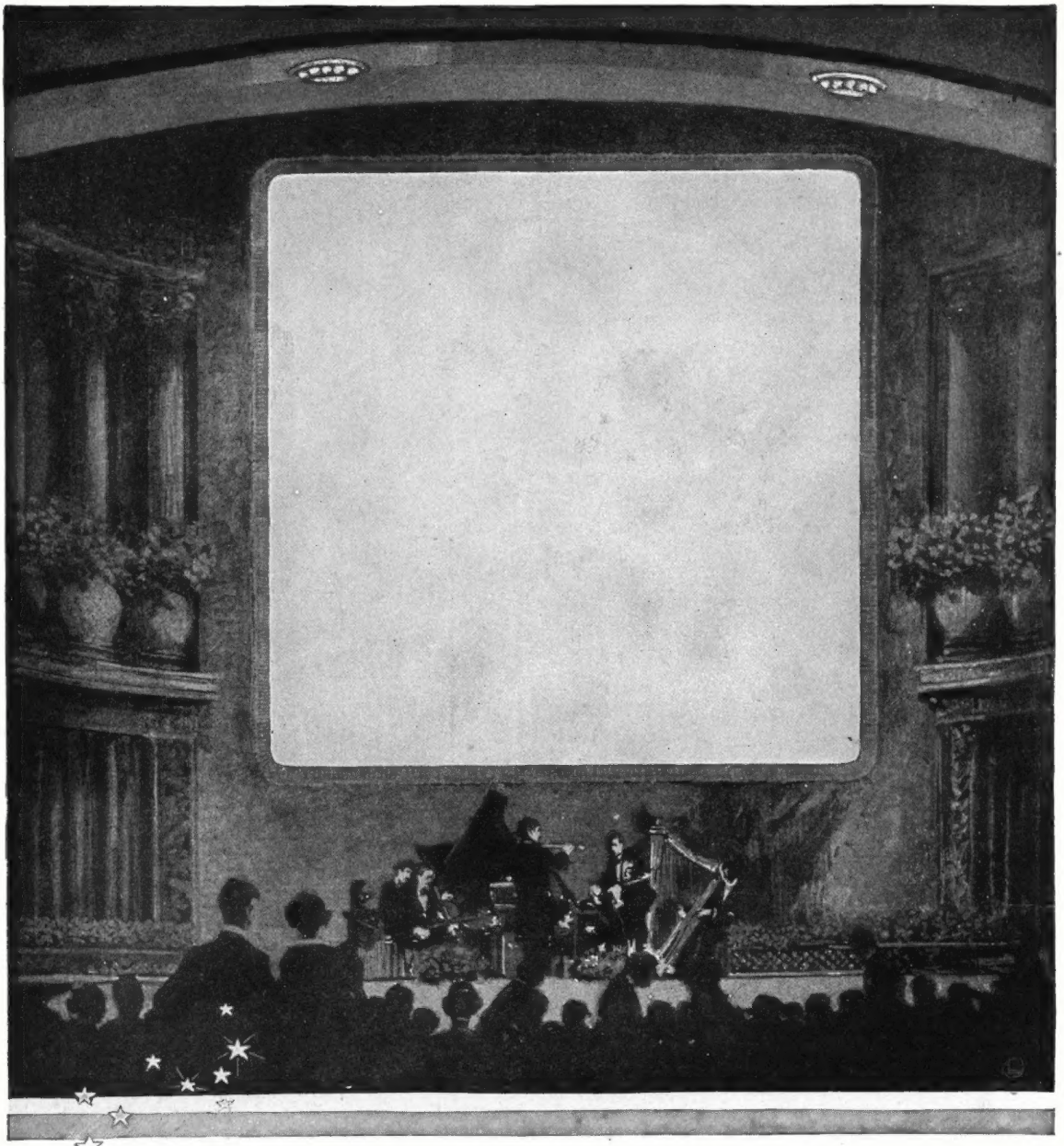
Adventure



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The Secret of Being a Convincing Talker

How I Learned It in One Evening

By GEORGE RAYMOND

"HAVE you heard the news about Frank Jordan?"

This question quickly brought me to the little group which had gathered in the center of the office. Jordan and I had started with the Great Eastern Machinery Co., within a month of each other, four years ago. A year ago Jordan was taken into the accounting division and I was sent out as salesman. Neither of us was blessed with an unusual amount of brilliancy, but we "got by" in our new jobs well enough to hold them.

Imagine my amazement, then, when I heard:

"Jordan's just been made Treasurer of the Company!"

I could hardly believe my ears. But there was the "Notice to Employees" on the bulletin-board, telling about Jordan's good fortune.

Now I knew that Jordan was a capable fellow, quiet and unassuming, but I never would have picked him for any such sudden rise. I knew, too, that the Treasurer of the Great Eastern had to be a big man, and I wondered how in the world Jordan landed the place.

The first chance I got I walked into Jordan's new office and after congratulating him warmly, I asked him to let me "in" on the details of how he jumped ahead so quickly. His story is so intensely interesting that I am going to repeat it as closely as I remember.

"I'll tell you just how it happened, George, because you may pick up a pointer or two that will help you.

"You remember how scared I used to be whenever I had to talk to the chief? You remember how you used to tell me that every time I opened my mouth I put my foot into it, meaning of course that every time I spoke I got into trouble? You remember when Ralph Sinton left to take charge of the Western office and I was asked to present him with the loving-cup the boys gave him, how flustered I was and how I couldn't say a word because there were people around? You remember how confused I used to be every time I met new people? I couldn't say what I wanted to say when I wanted to say it; and I determined that if there was any possible chance to learn how to talk I was going to do it.

"The first thing I did was to buy a number of books on public speaking, but they seemed to be meant for those who wanted to become orators, whereas what I wanted to learn was not only how to speak in public but how to speak to individuals under various conditions in business and social life.

"A few weeks later, just as I was about to give up hope of ever learning how to talk interestingly, I read an announcement stating that Dr. Frederick Houk Law had just completed a new course in business talking and public speaking entitled 'Mastery of Speech.' The course was offered on approval without money in advance, so since I had nothing whatever to lose by examining the lessons, I sent for them and in a few days they arrived. I glanced through the entire eight lessons, reading the headings and a few paragraphs here and there, and in about an hour the whole secret of effective speaking was opened to me.

"For example, I learned why I had always lacked confidence, why talking had always seemed something to be dreaded whereas it is really the simplest thing in the world to 'get up and talk.' I learned how to secure complete attention to what I was saying and how to make everything I said interesting, forceful and convincing. I learned the art of listening, the value of silence, and the power of brevity. Instead of being funny at the wrong time, I learned how and when to use humor with telling effect.

"But perhaps the most wonderful thing about the lessons were the actual examples of what things to say and when to say them to meet every condition. I found that there was a knack in making oral reports to my superiors. I found that there was a right way and a wrong way to present complaints, to give estimates, and to issue orders.

"I picked up some wonderful pointers about how to give my opinions, about how to answer complaints, about how to ask the bank for a loan, about how to ask for extensions. Another thing that struck me forcibly was that, instead of antagonizing people when I didn't agree with them, I learned how to bring them around to my way of thinking in the most pleasant sort of way. Then, of course, along with those lessons there were chapters on speaking before large audiences, how to find material for talking and speaking, how to talk to friends, how to talk to servants, and how to talk to children.

"Why, I got the secret the very first evening and it was only a short time before I was able to apply all of the principles and found that my words were beginning to have an almost magical effect upon everybody to whom I spoke. It seemed that I got things done instantly, where formerly, as you know, what I said 'went in one ear and out of the other.' I began to acquire an executive ability that surprised me. I smoothed out difficulties like a true diplomat. In my talks with the chief I spoke clearly, simply, convincingly. Then came my first promotion since I entered the accounting department. I was given the job of answering complaints, and I made good. From that I was given the job of making collections. When Mr. Buckley joined the Officers' Training Camp, I was made Treasurer. Between you and me, George, my salary is now $7,560 a year and I expect it will be more from the first of the year.

"And I want to tell you sincerely, that I attribute my success solely to the fact that I learned how to talk to people."

******

When Jordan finished, I asked him for the address of the publishers of Dr. Law's Course and he gave it to me. I sent for it and found it to be exactly as he had stated. After studying the eight simple lessons I began to sell to people who had previously refused to listen to me at all. After four months of record-breaking sales during the dullest season of the year, I received a wire from the chief asking me to return to the home office. We had quite a long talk in which I explained how I was able to break sales records—and I was appointed Sales Manager at almost twice my former salary. I know that there was nothing in me that had changed except that I had acquired the ability to talk where formerly I simply used "words without reason." I can never thank Jordan enough for telling me about Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking. Jordan and I are both spending all our spare time making public speeches on war subjects and Jordan is being talked about now as Mayor of our little Town.

ADVENTURE
Jan. 3rd, 1920

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Vol. 24 No. 1
Serial No. 145

Free Proof that I Can Raise Your Pay

No matter how much you are earning now, I can show you how to increase it. I have even taken failures and shown them how to make $100—$200, and in one case as high as $2,000 weekly. I am willing to prove this entirely at my risk and expense.

LET'S have a little chat about getting ahead—you and I. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches.

I'm no genius—far from it. I'm just a plain, everyday, unassuming sort of man. I know what poverty is. I've looked black despair in the eye—had failure stalk me around and hoodoo everything I did. I've known the bitterest kind of want.

But to-day all is different. I have money and all of the things that money will buy. I am rich also in the things that money won't buy—health, happiness and friendship. Few people have more of the blessings of the world than I.

It was a simple thing that jumped me up from poverty to riches. As I've said, I'm no genius. But I had the good fortune to know a genius. One day this man told me a "secret." It had to do with getting ahead and growing rich. He had used it himself with remarkable results. He said that every wealthy man knew this "secret,"—that is why he was rich.

I used the "secret." It surely had a good test. At that time I was flat broke. Worse than that, for I was several thousand dollars in the hole. I had about given up hope when I put the "secret" to work.

At first I couldn't believe my sudden change in fortune. Money actually flowed in on me. I was thrilled with a new sense of power. Things I couldn't do before became as easy for me to do as opening a door. My business boomed and continued to leap ahead at a rate that startled me. Prosperity became my partner. Since that day I've never known what it is to want for money, friendship, happiness, health or any of the good things of life.

That "secret" surely made me rich in every sense of the word.

My sudden rise to riches naturally surprised others. One by one people came to me and asked me how I did it. I told them. And it worked for them as well as it did for me.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. In one case I took a rank failure and in a few weeks had him earning as high as $2,000.00 a week. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with

it, barely eking out a living. To-day this young man is worth $200,000. He is building a $25,000 home—and paying cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling, whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

In a little town in New York lives a man who two years ago was pitied by all who knew him. From the time he was 14 he had worked and slaved—and at sixty he was looked upon as a failure. Without work—in debt to his charitable friends, with an invalid son to support, the outlook was pitchy black.

Then he learned the "secret." In two weeks he was in business for himself. In three months his plant was working night and day to fill orders. During 1916 the profits were $20,000. During 1917 the profits ran close to $40,000. And this genial 64-year young man is enjoying pleasures and comforts he little dreamed would ever be his.

I could tell you thousands of similar instances. But there's no need to do this as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can put it to work and see what it will do for you.

A Few Examples

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Among over 350,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster General Britt; Lieut. Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, former Vice-Pres. Art Metal Construction Co.; Gov. Ferris of Michigan, and many others of equal prominence.

$300 PROFIT FROM ONE DAY'S READING

"The result from one day's study netted me $300 cash. I think it a great book and would not be without it for ten times the cost."—A. W. Wilke, Faulkton, So. Dakota.

WORTH $15,000 AND MORE

"The book has been worth more than $15,000 to me."—Oscar B. Sheppard, 1417 E. Locust St., Decatur, Ill.

WOULD BE WORTH $100,000

"If I had only had it when I was 20 years old, I would be worth $100,000 to-day. It is worth a hundred times the price."—S. W. Taylor, The Santa Fe Ry., Milans, Tex.

SALARY JUMPED FROM $150 TO $800

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from $150 to $800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Cal.

FROM $100 TO $3,000 A MONTH

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from $100 a month to $3,000 the first month, and won a $250 prize for the best salesmanship in the state."—Private Leslie A. Still, A. E. F., France.

I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has about as much chance of attaining success in life as a railway engine has of crossing the continent without steam. The biggest ideas have no value without will-power to "put them over." Yet the will, altho heretofore entirely neglected, can be trained into wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in whatever form you want it—will come as easy as failure came before. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book, "Power of Will."

How You Can Prove This at My Expense

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must be a catch somewhere. But here is my offer. You can easily make thousands—you can't lose a penny.

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Look it over in your home. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over—just as it has for thousands of others—mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over a quarter of a million others—if you feel as they do that it's the next greatest book to the Bible—send me only $3.50 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by, I'll be out only the small profit on a three-and-a-half-dollar sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

Mail the coupon or write a letter now—you may never read this offer again.

PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
48-W Wilcox Block, MERIDEN, CONN.

PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
48-W Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

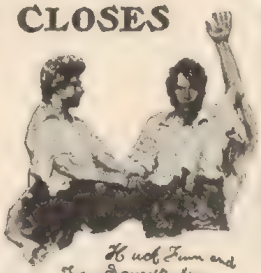
You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit $3.50 or remail the book to you in five days.

Name.....

Address.....

December 10th Last Day!

MARK TWAIN SALE CLOSES



Laugh and Grow Young

Today our great men know that to forget their cares, they must know how to laugh. Not the laughter of a passing jest or a pretty folly, but the deep, wholesome laughter that wells up from the heart.

You can forget the cares and burdens of *your* day if you knew the laughter that bubbles and twinkles through the pages of Mark Twain.

Everybody loves the man who laughs. He is at peace with the world—at peace with himself. He is a success in life—in business and at home.

Many times in the past few years you have said to yourself, "I *must* get that set of Mark Twain. I don't want my children to grow up without him."

But now the time has come when tomorrow will *not* do as well as today. We not only have to raise the price—we have to close the little payment sale.

Before you see another Mark Twain advertisement you will have missed your last chance to get his imperishable work at a low price.

MARK TWAIN 25 Volumes

Into Chinese and Russian, into Polish and French, into the languages in every queer corner of the world Mark Twain has been translated.

No American home can be without Mark Twain, for he is the spirit of America.

You can always get a set of Mark Twain—next year, ten years from now—the demand for his books is so heavy that we will always make them, no matter what the cost. But we will have to charge a price for them so high that they will become a luxury beyond the reach of most men.

Get your set while the price is low. Get your set now. Go back with Mark Twain and be a boy again.

FREE—Paine's Life of Mark Twain ... 4 Large Vols. Illustrated

Not only does this coupon bring Mark Twain at the low price, but it **brings you absolutely FREE Albert Bigelow Paine's Life of Mark Twain.**

It happens that we have a few sets of the four-volume edition on hand—not enough to dispose of in the usual way—so until the edition is exhausted, we will give you a complete set FREE with your set of Mark Twain.

There are only a few—this coupon brings you one—and never again will you have a chance to get one except at the full regular prices.

Cut out this coupon and mail it today

Send no money—the coupon puts you under no obligation. You do not have to think about it until the books are in your home. All that you do by mailing the coupon today is that if you do like the books you get them at the low price.

We take all the chances—you take none. This coupon means money in your pocket—money saved.

Do not wait until next month—next week or tomorrow—today—now is the time.

Send the coupon, now, today.

HARPER & BROTHERS, Est. 1817

Adv. 12-18-19

HARPER & BROTHERS
200 Franklin Sq.
New York

Send me, all charges prepaid, a set of Mark Twain's works in 25 volumes, illustrated, bound in handsome green cloth, stamped in gold with trimmed edges, and Paine's Life of Mark Twain, in 4 volumes bound to match FREE. If not satisfactory I will return them at your expense, otherwise I will send you $1.50 within 5 days and $2.00 a month for 18 months. For cash deduct 8% from remittance.

Name.....

Address.....

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Adventure

Registered in U. S. Patent Office

December 18th issue 1919 Vol. 23 No. 6

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Contents for Mid-December, 1919, Issue

(continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

AT the end of the Brazilian trail they hang, all neatly strung on wires—the skeletons of every animal from snake to man. And this is but a hint of the mystery that confronts the Americans who see the false moon rise over the Infernal Valley and find on the rocks strange stains. "The Green Splotches," by T. S. Stribling, in our next issue, is the first "Off the Trail" story.* A complete novelette.

AN Englishman and an American, in search of a hitherto unknown African tribe reputed to be ruled by a white woman, lured by rumors of fabulous riches, fight their way through the jungle country of the pigmies to what appears to be a baffling mystery. "The Alabaster Goddess," a complete novelette by Charles Beadle to appear in the next issue of *Adventure.*

* See Camp-Fire, page 184.

Adventure
December 18th issue ~ Vol. 23 No. 6

Man to Man

by Jackson Gregory

A four-part story, part one

Author of "Silver Slippers," "The Bells of San Juan," etc.

I

HIS pulses quickened and a bright eagerness came into Steve Packard's eyes as he rode deeper into the pine-timbered mountains. Today he was on the last lap of a delectable journey. Three days ago he had ridden out of the sun-baked town of San Juan; three months ago he had sailed out of a South Sea port.

Far down there, foregathering with sailormen in a dirty water-front boarding-house, he had grown suddenly and even tenderly reminiscent of a cleaner land which he had roamed as a boy. He looked back across the departed years as many a man has looked from just some such resort as Black Jack's boarding-house, a little wistfully withal. Abruptly he had gotten up and taken ship back across the Pacific. The house of Packard might have spelled its name with the seven letters of the word Impulse.

Late tonight or early tomorrow he would go down the trail into Packard's Grab, the valley which had been his grandfather's and, because of a burst of reckless generosity on the part of the old man, Steve's father's also. But never Steve's, pondered the man on the horse; word of his father's death had come to him five months ago and with it word of Phil Packard's speculations and sweeping losses.

But never had money's coming and money's going been a serious concern of Steve Packard and now his anticipation was sufficiently keen. The world was his; he had no need of a legal paper to state that the small fragment of the world known as

Ranch Number Ten belonged to him. He could ride upon it again, perhaps find one like old Bill Royce, the foreman, left. And then he could go on until he came to the other Packard ranch where his grandfather had lived and still might be living.

After all of this— Well, there were still sunny beaches here and there along the seven seas where he had still to lie and sun himself. Now it was a pure joy to note how the boles of pine and cedar pointed straight toward the clear, cloudless blue; how the little streams trickled through their worn courses; how the quail scurried to their brushy retreats; how the sunlight splashed warm and golden through the branches; how valleys widened and narrowed and thickly timbered ravines made a delightful and tempting coolness here and there upon the mountain-sides.

It was an adventure with its own thrill to ride around a bend in the narrow trail and be greeted by an old, well-remembered landmark; a flat-topped boulder where he had lain when a boy, looking up at the sky and marveling at the whispered promises of life; or a pool where he had fished or swam; or a tree he had climbed or from whose branches he had shot a gray squirrel. A wagon-road which he might have taken he abandoned for a trail which better suited his present fancy; the trail led with closer intimacy into the woods.

It was late afternoon when he came to the gentle rise which gave first glint of the little lake so like a blue jewel set in the dusty green of the wooded slopes. As he rose in his stirrups to gaze at the vista through a long line of tree-trunks, he saw the bright, vivid blue of a cloak.

"Now, there's a woman," thought Packard without enthusiasm. "The woods were quite well enough alone without her. As I suppose Eden was. But along she comes just the same. And of course she must pick out the one dangerous spot on the whole lake-shore to display herself on."

For he knew how, just yonder where the blue cloak caught the sunlight, there was a sheer bank and how the lapping water had cut into it, gouging it out year after year so that the loose soil above was always ready to crumble and spill into the lake. The wearer of the bright garment stirred and stood up, her back still toward him.

"Young girl, most likely," he hazarded an opinion.

Though she was too far from him to be at all certain, he had sensed something of youth's own in the very quality of her gesture.

Then suddenly he clapped his spurs to his horse's sides and went racing down the slope toward the spot where an instant ago she had made such a gay contrast to dull verdure and gray boulders. For he had glimpsed the quick flash of an up-thrown arm, had heard a low cry, had guessed rather than seen through the low underbrush her young body falling.

As he threw himself from his horse's back, his spur caught in the blue cloak which had dropped from her shoulders; he kicked at it savagely. He jerked off his boots, poised a moment looking down upon the disturbed surface of the water which had closed over her head, made out the sweep of an arm several feet under the widening circles and dived straight down.

And so several feet under water they met for the first time, Steve Packard with a sense of annoyance that was almost outright irritation, the girl struggling frantically as his right arm closed tight about her. A quick suspicion came to him that she had not fallen but had thrown herself downward in some passionate quarrel with life; that she wanted to die and would give him scant thanks for the rescue.

This thought was followed by the other that in her access of terror she was doing what the drowning person always does—losing her head, ready to bind his arms with her own and drag him down with her.

Struggling half blindly and all silently, they rose a little toward the surface. Packard tightened his grip about her body, managed to imprison one of her arms against her side, beat at the water with his free hand and so just as his lungs seemed ready to burst he brought his nostrils into the air.

He drew in a great breath and struck out mightily for the shore, seeking a less precipitous bank at the head of a little cove. As he did so, he noted how her struggles had suddenly given over, how she floated quietly with him, her free arm even aiding in their progress.

A little later he crawled out of the clear cold water to a pebbly beach, drawing her after him.

And now he understood that his destiny and his own headlong nature had again made a consummate fool of him. The same

knowledge was offered him freely in a pair of gray eyes which fairly blazed at him. No gratitude there of a maiden heroically succored in the hour of her supreme distress; just the leaping anger of a girl with a temper like hot fire who had been rudely handled by a stranger.

Her scanty little bathing-suit, bright blue like the discarded cloak, the red rubber cap binding the bronze hair—she must have donned the ridiculous thing with incredible swiftness while he batted an eye—might have been utterly becoming in other eyes than those of Steve Packard. Now that they merely told him that he was a blundering ass, he was conscious merely of a desire to pick her up and shake her.

"Gee!" she panted at him with an angry scornfulness which made him wince. "You're about the freshest proposition I ever came across!"

LATER, perhaps, he would admit that she was undeniably and most amazingly pretty; that the curves of her little white body were delightfully perfect; that she had made an armful that at another time would have put sheer delirium into a man's blood.

Just now he knew only that in his moment of nothing less than stupidity he had angered her and that his own anger though more unreasonable was scarcely less heated; that he had made and still made but a sorry spectacle; that he was sopping wet and cold and would be shivering in a moment like a freezing dog.

"Why did you want to yell like a Comanche Indian when you went in?" he demanded rudely, offering the only defense he could put mind or tongue to. "A man would naturally suppose that you were falling."

"You didn't suppose any such thing!" she retorted sharply. "You saw me dive; if you had the brains of a scared rabbit, you'd know that when a girl had gone to the trouble to climb into a bathing-suit and then jumped into the water she wanted a swim. And to be left alone," she added scathingly.

Packard felt the afternoon breeze through the wet garments which stuck so close to him, and shivered.

"If you think," he said as sharply as she had spoken, "that I just jumped into that infernal ice-pond, clothes and all, for the pure joy of making your charming acquaintance in some ten feet of water, all I can say is that you are by no means lacking a full appreciation of your own attractiveness."

She opened her eyes widely at him, lying at his feet where he had deposited her. She had not offered to rise. But now she sat up, drawing her knees into the circle of her clasped arms, tilting her head back as she stared up at him.

"You've got your nerve, Mr. Man," she informed him coolly. "Any time that you think I'll stand for a fool man jumping in and spoiling my fun for me and then scolding me on top of it, you've got another good-sized think coming. And take it from me, you'll last a good deal longer in this neck of the woods if you 'tend to your own business after this and keep your paws off other folks' affairs. Get me that time?"

"I get you all right," grunted Packard. "And I find your gratitude to a man who has just risked his life for you quite touching."

"Gratitude? Bah!" she told him, leaping suddenly to her feet. "Risked your life for me, did you?" She laughed jeeringly at that. "Why, you big lummox, I could have yanked you out as easy as turn a somersault if you started to drown. And now suppose you hammer the trail while it's open."

He bestowed upon her a glance whose purpose was to wither her. It failed miserably, partly because she was patently not the sort to be withered by a look from a mere man, and partly because a violent and inopportune shiver shook him from head to foot.

Until now there had been only bright anger in the girl's eyes. Suddenly the light there changed; what had begun as a sniff at him altered without warning into a highly amused giggle.

"Golly, Mr. Man," she taunted him. "You're sure some swell picture as you stand there, hand on hip and popping your eyes out at me! Like a king in a story book, only he'd just got a ducking and was trying to stare the other fellow down. Which is one thing you can't do with me."

Her eyes had the adorable trick of seeming to crinkle to a mirth which would have been an extremely pleasant phenomenon to witness had she been laughing with him instead of at him. As matters stood, Packard was quite prepared to dislike her heartily.

"I'd add to your kind information that the trail is open at both ends," he told her

significantly. "I'm going to find a sunny spot and dry my clothes. No objection, I suppose?"

He clambered up the bank and made his way to the spot whence he had dived after her, bent on retrieving his boots and spurs. Her eyes followed him interestedly. He ignored her and set about extricating a spur rowel from the fabric of the bright blue cloak. Her voice floated up to him then, demanding:

"What in the world are you up to now? Not going to swipe my clothes, are you?"

"I'd have the right," he called back over his shoulder, "if I happened to need a makeshift dressing-gown. As it is, however, I am trying to get my spur out of the thing."

"You great big brute!" she wailed at him, and here she came running along the bank. "You just dare to tear my cloak and I'll hound you out of the country for it! I drove forty miles to get it and this is the first time I ever wore it. Stupid!"

And she jerked both the garment and the spur from him.

The lining was silken, of a deep, rich, golden hue. And already it was torn, although but the tiniest bit in the world, by one of the sharp spikes. Her temper, however, ever ready it seemed, flared out again; the crinkling merriment went from her eyes, leaving no trace; the color warmed in her cheeks as she cried:

"You're just like all the rest of your breed, big and awkward, crowding in where you don't belong, messing up the face of the earth, spoiling things right and left. I wonder if the good Lord himself knows what he made men for, anyway!"

The offending spur, detached by her quick fingers, described a bright arc in the late sunlight, flew far out, dipped in a little leaping spurt of spray and went down quietly in the lake.

"Go jump in and get that, if you are so keen on saving things," she mocked him. "There's only about fifteen feet of water to dig through."

"You little devil!" he said without waiting or wanting time to pick and choose his word.

For the spur with its companion had cost him twenty dollars down on the Mexican border ten days ago and he had set much store by it.

"Little devil, am I?" she retorted readily. "You'll know it if you don't keep on your side of the road. Look at that tear! Just look at it!"

She had stepped quite close to him, holding out the cloak, her eyes lifted defiantly to his. He put out a sudden hand and laid it on her wet shoulder. She opened her eyes widely again at the new look in his. But even so her regard was utterly fearless.

"Young lady," he said sternly, "so help me God I've got the biggest notion in the world to take you across my knee and give you the spanking of your life. If I did crowd in where I don't belong, as you so sweetly put it, it was at least to do you a kindness. Another time I'd know better; I'd sooner do a favor for a wildcat."

"Take your dirty paws off me," she cried, wrenching away from him.

"And—spank me, would you?" The fire leaped higher in her eyes, the red in her cheeks gave place to an angrier white. "If you ever so much as dared touch me again——"

She broke off, panting. Packard laughed at her.

"You'd try to scratch me, I suppose," he jeered, "and then, after the fashion of your own sweet sex, when you don't have the strength to put a thing across, you'd most likely cry!"

"I'd blow your ugly head off your shoulders with a shotgun," she concluded briefly.

And despite the extravagance of the words it was borne in upon Packard's understanding that she meant just exactly what she said.

He was getting colder all the time and knew that in a moment his teeth would chatter. So a second time he turned his back on her, gathered up his horse's reins and moved away, seeking a spot in the woods where he could get dry and sun his clothes. And since Packard rage comes swiftly and more often than not goes the same way, within five minutes over a comforting cigaret he was grinning widely, seeing in a flash all of the humor of the situation which had successfully concealed itself from him until now.

"And I don't blame her so much, after all," he chuckled. "Taking a nice lonely dive, to have a fool of a man grab her all of a sudden when she was enjoying herself half-a-dozen feet under water. It's enough to stir up a good healthy temper. Which, by the Lord, she has!"

II

HALF an hour later, his clothing wrung out and sun-dried after a fashion, Packard dressed, swung up into the saddle and turned back into the trail. And through the trees, where their rugged trunks made an open vista, he saw not two hundred yards away the gay spot of color made by the blue cloak. So she was still here, lingering down the road that wound about the lake's shores, when already he had fancied her far on her way. He wondered for the first time where that way led?

He drew rein among the pines, waiting in his turn for her to go on. The blue cloak did not move. He leaned to one side to see better, peering around a low-flung cedar bough. His trail here led to the road; he must pass her unless she went on soon.

Beside the vivid hue of her cloak the sunlight streaming through the forest showed him another bright, gay color, a streak of red which across the underbrush he was at first at a loss to account for. He would have said that she was seated in a low-bodied red wagon, were it not that if such had been the case he must have seen the horses.

"An automobile!" he guessed.

He rode on a score of steps and stopped again. Sure enough, there she sat at the steering-wheel of a long, rakish touring-car, the slump of her shoulders vaguely hinting at despair and perhaps a stalled engine. His grin widened joyously. He touched his horse with his one spur, summoned an expression of vast indifference and rode on. She jerked up her head, looked about at him swiftly, then gave him her shoulder again.

He rode into the road and came on with tantalizing slowness, knowing that she would want to turn again and guessing that she would conquer the impulse. A few paces behind her he stopped again, rolling a fresh cigaret and seeming, as he had been before the meeting, the most leisurely man in the world.

He saw her lean forward, busied with ignition and starter; he fancied that the little breeze brought to him the faintest of guarded exclamations.

"The blamed old thing won't go," chuckled Packard with vast satisfaction. "Some car, too. Boyd-Merril Twin Eight, latest model. And dollars to doughnuts I know just what's wrong—and she doesn't!"

She ignored him with such a perfect unconsciousness of his presence in the same world with her that he was moved to a keen admiration.

"I'll bet her face is as red as a beet, just the same," was his cheerful thought. "And right here, Steve Packard, is where you don't 'crowd in' until you're called on."

She straightened up, sitting very erect, her two hands tense upon the useless wheel. He noted the poise of her head and found in it something almost queenly. For a moment they were both very still, he watching and feeling his sense pervaded by the glowing sensation that all was right with the world, she holding her face averted and keeping her thoughts to herself.

Presently she got out and lifted the hood, looking in upon the engine despairingly, but did not glance toward him. In a little while she closed the hood and returned to her seat, once more attempting to get some sort of response from the starting system. Packard felt himself fairly beaming all over.

"I may be a low-lived dog and a deep-dyed villain besides," he was frank to admit to himself, "but right now I'm having the time of my life. And I wouldn't bet two-bits which way she's going to jump next, either, never having met just her type before."

"Well?" she said abruptly.

She hadn't moved, hadn't so much as turned her head to look at him. If she had done so just then perhaps Packard's extremely good-humored smile, a contented, eminently satisfied smile, would not have warmed her to him.

"Speak to me?" he asked innocently.

"I did. Simply because there's nobody else to speak to. Don't happen to know anything about motor-cars, do you?"

It was all very icily enunciated but had no noticeably freezing effect upon the man's mood.

"I sure do," he told her cheerfully. "Know 'em from front bumper to tail-lamp. Yours is a Boyd-Merril, Twin Eight, this year's model. Fox-Whiting starting and lighting system. Great little car, too, if you ask me."

"What I was going to ask you," came the cool little voice, more haughtily than ever, "was not what you think of the car but if you—if you happened to know how to make the miserable thing go."

"Sure," he replied to the back of her head

with all of his former pleasant manner. "Pull out the ignition-button; push down the starter-pedal with your right foot; throw out the clutch with your left; put her into low; let in your clutch slowly; give her a little——"

"Smarty!" He had counted upon some such interruption and chuckled silently when it came. "I know all that."

"Then why don't you do it?" he queried innocently. "You're right square in my way, the road's narrow and I've got to be moving on."

"I don't do it," she informed that portion of the world which lay immediately in front of her slightly elevated nose, "because it won't work. I pulled out the ignition button and—and nothing happened. Then I tried to force down the starter-pedal and the crazy thing won't go down."

"I see," said Packard interestedly. "Don't know a whole lot about cars, do you?"

"The world wasn't made overnight," she said tartly. "I've had this pesky thing a month. Do you know what's the matter?"

He took his time in replying. He was so long about it, in fact, that Miss Blue Cloak stirred uneasily and finally shot him a questioning look over her shoulder, just to make sure, he suspected, that he hadn't slipped away and left her.

"Well?" she asked again.

"Speak to me?" he repeated himself, pretending to start from a deep abstraction. "Oh, do I know what's the matter? Sure."

She waited a reasonable length of time for him to go on. He, secure in the sense of his own mastery of the situation, waited for her. Between them they allowed it to grow very quiet there in the wood by the lake shore. He saw her glance furtively at the lowering sun.

"If you do know," she said finally and somewhat faintly, but as frigidly as ever, "will you tell me or won't you?"

"Why," he said as though he had not thought of it, "I don't know. If I were really sure that I was needed. You know it's mighty hard telling these days when you stumble upon a damsel in distress whether a stranger's aid is welcome or not. If there's one thing I won't do it's shove myself forward when I'm not wanted."

"You're a nasty animal!" she cried hotly.

"For all I know," he resumed in an untroubled tone, "the end of your journey may be just around the bend, about a hundred yards off. And if I plunged in to be of assistance I might be suspected of being a fresh guy."

"It's half a dozen miles to the ranch-house," she condescended to tell him. "And it's going to get dark in no time. And if you want to know, Mr. Smarty, that's as close as I've ever come or ever will come to asking anything of any man that ever lived."

He could have sat there until dark just for the sheer joy of teasing her, making her pay a little for her recent treatment of him. But there was a note of finality in her voice which did not escape him; in another moment she would jump down and go on on foot, and he knew it. So at last he rode up to the car, dismounted and lifted the hood.

"Ignition," he ordered her.

She pulled out the little button again. His eyes upon hers, his grin frank and unconcealed, he took a stone from the road and with it tapped gently upon the shaft running from pump. Immediately there came that little hissing sound she had waited for.

"Starter," he commanded.

And now her foot upon pedal achieved the desired results; the engine responded, humming pleasantly. He closed the hood and stood back eying her with a mingling of amusement and triumph. Her face reddened slowly. And then, startling him with its unheralded unexpectedness, a gay peal of laughter from her made quite another girl of her, a dimpling, radiant, altogether adorable and desirable creature.

"Oh, I know when I'm beat," she cried frankly. "You've put one across on me today, Mr. Man. And since you meant well all along and were just simply the blunder-headed man God made you, I guess, I guess I have been a little cat. Good luck to you and a worth-while trail to ride."

She blew him a friendly kiss from her brown finger-tips, bent over her wheel and took the first turn in the road at a swiftly acquired speed which left Steve Packard behind in dust and growing wonderment.

"And she's been driving only a month!" was his softly whistled comment. "Reckless little devil."

Then in his turn cocking a speculative

eye at the sun in the west, he rode on, following in the track made by the spinning automobile tires.

III

WHEN Packard came to a forking of the roads he stopped and hesitated. The automobile tracks led to the left; he was tempted to follow them. And it was his way in the matter of such impulses to yield to temptation. But in this case he finally decided that common sense if not downright wisdom lay in the other direction. So, albeit a bit reluctantly, he swerved to the right.

"We'll see you some other time though, Miss Blue Cloak," he pondered, "for I have a notion it would be good sport knowing you."

An hour later he made out a lighted window, seen and lost through the trees. Conscious of a man's-sized appetite, he galloped up the long lane, turned in at a gate sagging wearily upon its hinges and rode to the door of the lighted house. The first glance showed him that it was a long, low, rambling affair resembling in dejectedness the drooping gate. An untidy sort of man in shirt-sleeves and smoking a pipe came to the door, kicking into silence his half-dozen dogs.

"What's the chance of something to eat and a place to sleep in the barn?" asked Packard.

The rancher waved his pipe widely.

"Help yourself, stranger," he answered in a voice meant to be hospitable but which through long habit had acquired an unpleasantly sullen tone. "You'll find the sleeping all right, but when it comes to something to eat you can take it from me you'll find —— poor picking. Get down, feed your horse and come in."

When he entered the house Packard was conscious of an oddly bare and cheerless atmosphere which at first he was at a loss to explain. For the room was large, amply furnished, cheerfully lighted by a crackling fire of dry sticks in the big rock fireplace, and a lamp swung from the ceiling.

What the matter was dawned on him gradually; time was when this chamber had been richly, even exquisitely furnished and appointed. Now it presented rather a dejected spectacle of faded splendor, not entirely unlike a fine gentleman of the old school fallen among bad companions and into tattered ill repute.

The untidy host, more untidy than ever here in the full light, dragged his slippered feet across the threadbare carpet to a corner cupboard from which he took a bottle and two glasses.

"We can have a drink anyhow," he said in that dubious tone which so harmonized both with himself and his sitting-room, "after which we'll see what's to eat. Terry fired the cook last week and there's been small feasting since."

Packard accepted a moderate drink, the rancher filled his own glass generously and they drank standing. This ceremony briefly performed and chairs dragged comfortably up to the fireplace, Packard's host called out loudly:

"Hi, Terry! There's a man here wants something to eat. Anything left?"

"If he's hungry," came the cool answer from a room somewhere toward the other end of the long house, "why can't he forage for himself? Wants me to bring his rations in there and feed it to him, I suppose!"

Packard lifted his eyebrows humorously.

"Is that Terry?" he asked.

"That's Terry," grumbled the rancher. "She's in the kitchen now. And if I was you, pardner, and had a real hankering for grub I'd mosey right along in there while there's something left." His eye roved to the bottle on the chimney-piece and dropped to the fire. "I'll trail you in a minute."

Here was invitation sufficient and Packard rose swiftly, went out through the door at the end of the room, passed through an untidy chamber which had no doubt been intended originally as a dining-room, and so came into lamplight again and the presence of Miss Blue Cloak.

He made her a bow and smiled in upon her cheerfully. She, perched on an oil-cloth table, her booted feet swinging, a thick sandwich in one hand and a steaming cup of coffee in the other, took time to look him up and down seriously and to swallow before she answered his bow with a quick, blind-like nod.

"Don't mind me," she said briefly, having swallowed again. "Dig in and help yourself."

On the table beside her were bread, butter, a very dry and black-looking roast and a blacker but more tempting coffee-pot.

"I didn't follow you on purpose," said Packard. "Back there where the roads forked I saw that you had turned to the left so I turned to the right."

"All roads lead to Rome," she said around the corner of the big sandwich. "Anyway it's all right. I guess I owe you a square meal and a night's lodging for being on the job when my car stalled."

"Not to mention for diving into the lake after you," amended Packard.

"I wouldn't mention it if I were you," she retorted, "seeing that you just made a fool of yourself that time."

She openly sniffed the air as he stepped by her to reach out for butcher-knife and roast.

"So you are dad's kind, are you? Hitting the booze every show you get. The Lord deliver me from His chief blunder. Meaning a man."

"He probably will," grinned Packard genially. "And as for turning up your nose at a fellow for taking a drop o' kindness with a hospitable host, why, that's all nonsense, you know."

Terry kicked her high heels impudently and vouchsafed him no further answer beyond that easy gesture. Packard made his own sandwich, found the salt, poured a tin-cup of coffee.

"The sugar's over there."

She jerked her head toward a shelf on which, after some searching among a lot of empty and nearly empty cans, Packard found it.

"That's all there is and precious little left; help yourself but don't forget breakfast comes in the morning."

"This is the old Slade place, isn't it?" Packard asked.

"It was about the time the big wall was building in China. Where've you been the last couple of hundred years? It's the Temple place now."

"Then you're Miss Temple?"

"Teresa Arriega for my mother, Temple for my dad," she told him in the quick, bright way which already he found characteristic of her. "Terry for myself, if you say it quick."

He had suspected from the beginning that there was Southern blood of some strain in her. Now he studied her frankly and, just to try her out, said carelessly:

"If you weren't so tanned you'd be quite fair; your eyes are gray, too. Blue-gray when you smile, dark gray when you are angry, and yet you say your mother was Mexican——"

"Mexican, your foot!" she flared out at him, her trim little body stiffening perceptibly, her chin proudly lifted. "The Arriegas were pure-blooded Castilian, I'd have you understand. There's no mongrel about me."

He drowned his satisfied chuckle with a draft of coffee.

"I'm looking for a job," he said abruptly. "Happen to know of any of the cattle outfits around here that are short-handed?"

"Men are scarce right now," she answered. "A good cattle-hand is as hard to locate as a Dodo bird. You could get a job anywhere if you're worth your salt."

"I was thinking," said Packard, "of moseying on to Ranch Number Ten. There's a man I used to know—Bill Royce, his name is. Foreman, isn't he?"

"So you know Bill Royce," countered Terry. "Well, that's something in your favor. He's a good scout."

"Then he is still foreman?"

"I didn't say so! No, he isn't. And I guess he'll never be foreman of that outfit or any other again. He's blind."

Old Bill Royce blind! Here was a shock, and Packard sat back and stared at her speechlessly. Somehow this was incredible, unthinkable, nothing short. The old cattleman who had been the hero of his boyhood, who had taught him to shoot and ride and swim, who had been so vital and so quick and keen of eye—blind?

"What happened to him?" asked Packard presently.

"Suppose you ask him," she retorted, "if you know him so well. He is still with the outfit. A man named Blenham is the foreman now. He's old Packard's right-hand bower, you know."

"But Phil Packard is dead. And ——"

"And old 'Hell-Fire' Packard, Phil Packard's father, never will die. He's just naturally too low-down mean; the devil himself wouldn't have him."

"TERRY!" came the voice of the untidy man, meant to be remonstrative but chiefly noteworthy for a newly acquired thickness of utterance.

Terry's eyes sparkled and a hot flush came into her cheeks.

"Leave me alone, will you, pa?" she cried sharply. "I don't owe old Packard

anything; no, nor Blenham either. You can walk easy all you like but I'm blamed if I've got to. If you'd smash your cursed old bottle on their heads and take a brace we'd come alive yet."

"Remember, we have a guest with us," grumbled Temple from his place by the sitting-room fire.

"Oh, shoot!" exclaimed the girl impatiently. Reaching out for a second sandwich, she stabbed the kitchen-knife viciously into the roast. "I've a notion to pack up and clear out and let the cutthroat crowd clean you to the last copper and pick your bones into the bargain. When did you ever get anywhere by taking your hat off and sidestepping for a Packard? If you're so all-fired strong for remembering, why don't you try to remember how it feels to stand on two feet like a man instead of crawling on your belly like a worm!"

"My dear," expostulated Temple.

Terry sniffed and paid no further attention to him.

"Dad was all man once," she said without lowering her voice, making clearer than ever that Miss Terry Temple had a way of speaking straight out what lay in her mind, caring not at all who heard. "I'm hoping that some day he'll come back. A real man was dad, a man's man. But that was before the Packards broke him and stepped on him and kicked him out of the trail. And believe me, the Packards, though they ought to be hung to the first tree, are men just the same!"

"So I have heard," admitted the youngest of the defamed house. "You group them all together? They're all the same then?"

"Phil Packard's dead," she retorted. "So we'll let him go at that. Old Hell-Fire Packard, his father, is the biggest lawbreaker out of jail. He's the only one left, and from the looks of things he'll keep on living and making trouble another hundred years."

"There was another Packard, wasn't there?" he insisted. "Phil Packard's son, the old man's grandson?"

"Never knew him," said Terry. "A scamp and a scalawag and a tomfool, though, if you want to know. If he wasn't he'd stuck on the job instead of messing around in the dirty ports of the seven seas while his old thief of a grandfather stole his heritage from him."

"How's that?" he asked sharply. "How do you mean 'stole' it from him?"

"The same way he gobbles up everything else he wants. Ranch Number Ten ought to belong to the fool boy now, oughtn't it? And here's old Packard's pet dog Blenham running the outfit in old Packard's interests just the same as if it was his already. Set a thief to rob a thief," she concluded briefly.

Steve Packard sat bolt upright in his chair.

"I wouldn't mind getting the straight of this," he told her quietly. "I thought that Philip Packard had sold the outfit to his father before his death."

"He didn't sell it to anybody. He mortgaged it right up to the hilt to the old man. Then he up and died. Of course everything he left, amounting mostly to a pile of debts, went to his good-for-nothing son."

A light which she could not understand, eager and bright, shone in young Packard's eyes. If what she told him were true, then the old home ranch, while commonly looked upon as belonging already to his grandfather, was the property legally of Steve Packard. And Blenham—yes, and old Bill Royce—were taking his pay. Suddenly infinite possibilities stretched out before him.

"Come alive!" laughed Terry. "We were talking about your finding a job. There's one open here for you; first, to teach me all you know about the insides of my car; second—What's the matter? Gone to sleep?"

He started. He had been thinking about Blenham and Bill Royce. As Terry continued to stare wonderingly at him he smiled suddenly.

"If you don't mind," he said noncommittally, "we'll forget about the job for a spell. I left some stuff back at the Packard ranch that belongs to me. I'm going back for it in the morning. Maybe I'll go to work there after all."

She shrugged distastefully.

"It's a free country," she said curtly. "Only I can't see your play. That is, if you're a square guy and not a crook, Number Ten size. You've got a chance to go to work here with a white crowd; if you want to tie up with that ornery bunch it's up to you."

"I'll look them over," he said thoughtfully.

"All right; go to it!" she cried with sudden heat. "I said it was a free country, didn't I? Only you can burn this in your next wheat-straw; once you go to riding herd with that gang you needn't come around here again. And you can take Blenham a message for me: Phil Packard knifed dad and doubled-crossed him and made him pretty nearly what he is now; old Hell-Fire Packard finished the job. But just the same the Temple Ranch is still on the map and Terry Temple had rather scrap a scoundrel to the finish than shake hands with one. And one of these days dad's going to come alive yet; you'll see."

"I believe," he said as much to himself as to her, "that I'll have to have a word with old man Packard."

She stared at him incredulously. Then she put her head back and laughed in high amusement.

"Nobody'd miss guessing that you had your nerve with you, Mr. Lanky Stranger," she cried mirthfully. "But when it comes to tackling Hell-Fire Packard with a mouthful of fool questions— Look here; who are you anyway?"

"Nobody much," he answered quietly and just a trifle bitterly. "Tom Fool you named me a while ago. Or, if you prefer, Steve Packard."

She flipped from her place on the table to stand erect, twin spots of red leaping into her cheeks, startling him with the manner in which all mirth fled from her eyes, which narrowed and grew hard.

"That would mean old Hell-Fire's grandson?" she asked sharply.

He merely nodded, watching her speculatively. Her head went still higher. Packard heard her father rise hurriedly and shuffle across the floor toward the kitchen.

"You're a worthy chip off the old stump," Terry was saying contemptuously. "Sneak!"

"Terry!" admonished Temple warningly.

Her still little figure remained motionless a moment, never an eyelid stirring. Then she whirled and went out of the room, banging the door after her.

"She's high-strung, Mr. Packard," said Temple, slow and heavy and a bit uncertain in his articulation. "High-strung like her mother, and at times apt to be unreasonable. Come in with me and have a drink and we'll talk things over."

Packard hesitated. Then he turned and followed his host back to the fireplace. Suddenly he found himself without further enthusiasm for conversation.

IV

HAD Steve Packard ridden straightway back to Ranch Number Ten he would have arrived at the ranch headquarters long before noon. But the next day, once out in the still dawn, he rode slowly. His mind, when he could detach it from that irritating Terry Pert, was given over to a searching consideration of those conditions which were begininng to dawn on him.

It was clear that his destiny was offering him a new trail to blaze, one which drew him on with its lure, tempted him with its vague promises. There was nothing to cause surprize in the fact that the ranch was his to have and to hold if he had the skill and the will for the job; nor yet in the other fact that the outfit was mortgaged to his grandfather; nor, again, was it to be wondered at that the old man was already acting as actual owner.

For never had the eldest Packard had any use for the subtleties and niceties and confusing technicalities of the law. It was his way to see clearly what he wanted, to make up his mind definitely as to a desired result and then to go after it the shortest way. And that way never led yet through the law-courts.

These matters were clear. But as he dwelt upon them they were made complex by other considerations hingeing upon him. Most of all he had to take stock of what lay in his mind and soul, of all that dwelt behind his present purpose.

Riding back to Ranch Number Ten, saying, "It is mine and I mean to have it," was simple enough. But for him actually to commit himself to the line of action which this step would entail would very obviously connote a distinct departure from the familiar, aimless responsibility-free career of Steve Packard.

If he once sat into the game he'd want to stick for a showdown; if he started out now bucking old man Packard he would perhaps wind up in the scrap heap. It was just as well to think things over before he plunged in—which set him musing upon Terry again.

Swerving from yesterday's path he followed a new trail leading about the edge of

the Temple ranch and into the southeastern borders of Ranch Number Ten. At a logging-camp well up on the slope of the mountains just after he had forded the upper waters of Packard's Creek, he breakfasted on warmed-over coffee and greasy hotcakes. He opened his eyes interestedly as he watched a gang of timberjacks cutting into a forest of his pines.

"Old Man Packard's crowd?" he asked the camp cook.

"Sure thing," was the cook's careless answer.

Steve Packard rode on, grown more thoughtful than before. But he directed his course this way and that on a speculative tour of investigation, seeking to see the greater part of the big, sprawling ranch, to note just what had been done, just what was being done, before having his talk with Blenham. And so the first stars were out before he at length came again to the home corrals.

WHILE Steve was turning down into Packard's Grab from the foot-hills, the men working for Ranch Number Ten, having eaten their supper, were celebrating the end of a hard day's work with tobacco smoke and desultory talk.

There were a dozen of them, clear-eyed, iron-muscled, quick-footed to the last man of them. For wherever Packard pay was taken it went into the pockets of just such as these, purposeful, self-reliant, men's men who could be counted on in a pinch and who, that they might be held in the service which required such as they, were paid better wages than other ranches offered.

Young, most of them, too, boisterous when upon occasion their hands were idle, devil-may-care scalawags who had earned in many a little cattle town up and down the country their title as "that wild gang of Packard's," prone to headlong ways and yet dependable.

There are such men; Packard knew it and sought them out and held them to him. The oldest man there, saving Bill Royce only, was Blenham, the foreman, and Blenham had yet to see his thirty-fifth birthday.

Ten years ago, that is to say before he came into the cattle-country and found work with Packard, Blenham had been a sergeant in the regular Army, had seen something of service on the border. Now, in his dealings with the men under him, he brought here all that he had learned from a military life.

He held himself aloof, was seldom to be found in the bunk-house, making his quarters in the old ranch-house. He was crisp and final in his orders and successful in exacting swift attention when he spoke and immediate obedience when he ordered.

Few of his men liked him; he knew this as well as another and cared not the snap of his big, blunt fingers. There was remarkably little of the sentimental about Blenham. He was a capable lieutenant for such as the master of the Packard millions; he earned and received his increase in wages every year; he got results.

This evening, however, the man's heavy, studied indifference to all about him was ruffled. During the afternoon something had gone wrong and no one yet, save "Cookie" Wilson, had an inkling of what had plunged the foreman into one of his ill-tempered fits.

Tomorrow it would be a ranch topic when Cookie could have had ample time to embroider the thin fabric of his surmise; for it had fallen to the cook's lot to answer the bunk-house telephone when there had been a long-distance message for Blenham—and Wilson recognized old man Packard's voice in a fit of rage.

No doubt the foreman of Ranch Number Ten had "slipped up" somewhere and his chief in a very few words and those of a brand not to be misunderstood had taken him to task. At any rate Cookie was swelling with eager conjecture and Blenham was in an evil mood. All evening his spleen had been rising in his throat, nearly choking him; now suddenly he spewed it upon Bill Royce.

"Royce!" he burst out abruptly.

The blind man was lying upon the edge of his bunk at the far end of the room, smoking his pipe. He stirred uneasily.

"Well?" he asked. "What is it?"

"Cool old cucumber, ain't you?" jeered Blenham. "Layin' there like a bag of mush while you listen to me. —— you, when I talk to you, stand up!"

Royce's form stiffened perceptibly; his lips tightened about the stem of his pipe. But before he could shape his rejoinder there came an unexpected voice from one of the four men just beginning a game of pedro under the swinging lamp, a young voice, impudent, clear-toned, almost musical.

"Tell him to go to ——, Bill," was the freely-proffered counsel.

Blenham swung about on his heel, his eyes narrowing.

"That you, Barbee?" he demanded sharply.

"Sure it's me," rejoined Barbee with the same cool impudence. And to the man across the table from him: "Deal 'em up, 'Spots'; you an' me is goin' to pry these two bum gamblers loose from their four-pieces real *pronto* by the good ol' road of high, low, jack an' the game. Come ahead, Spots-ol'-Spotty."

Blenham stared a moment, obviously surprized by this attitude taken by young Barbee. But swiftly the look in his eyes altered to one of anger.

"I'll attend to you when I got nothin' else to do, Barbee," he said shortly. And, giving the whole of his attention again to the man on the bunk: "Royce, I said when I talk to you to stand up!"

TO THE last man of them, even to young Barbee, who had made his youthful pretense at an all-embracing interest in the cards, they turned to watch Bill Royce and see what he would do.

They saw that Royce lay a moment as he was, stiff and rigid to his hands and feet, that his face had gone a fiery red which threw the white of the long scar across his nose into bloodless contrast, that the most obvious thing in the world was that for the moment his mind was torn two ways, dual-purposed, perfectly balanced, so that in the grip of his contending passions he was powerless to stir, a picture of impotence, like a man paralyzed.

"Blenham," he said presently without moving, his voice uncertain and thick and ugly, "Blenham——"

"I said it once," cried Blenham sharply, "an' I said it twice. Which ought to be enough, Bill Royce! Hear me?"

They all watched interestedly. Bill Royce moistened his lips and presented his pitiful spectacle of a once-strong man on the verge of yielding to his master, to the man he hated most on earth. A smile came into Blenham's expectant eyes.

The brief silence was perfect until the youthful Barbee broke it, not by speech but by whistling softly, musically, impudently. And the air which Barbee selected at this juncture, though not drawn from the classics, served its purpose adequately; the song was a favorite in the range-lands, the refrain simple, profane and sincere. Translated into words, Barbee's merry notes were:

"Oh, I don't give a —— for no —— man that don't give a —— for me!"

Blenham understood and scowled at him; Bill Royce's hesitant soul may have drawn comfort and strength from a sympathy wordlessly expressed. At any rate his reply came suddenly now:

"I've took a good deal off'n you, Blenham," he said quietly. "I'd be glad to take all I could. But a man can't stand everything, no, not even for an absent pal. Like Barbee said, you go to ——!"

Cookie Wilson gasped, his the sole audible comment upon an entirely novel situation. Barbee smiled delightedly. Blenham continued to frown, his scowl subtly altered from fierceness to wonder.

"You'll obey orders," he snapped shortly, "or ——"

"I know," replied Royce heavily. "Go to it. All you got to do is fire me."

And now the pure wonder of the moment was that Blenham did not discharge Royce in three words. It was his turn for hesitation for which there was no explanation forthcoming.

"—— you!" he growled and whirled upon Barbee.

Yellow-haired Barbee at the table promptly stood up, awaiting no second invitation to that look of Blenham's. Were one staging a morality play and in search of the personification of impertinence, he need look no further than this cocksure youth.

He was just at that age when one is determined that there shall be no mistake about his status in the matters of age and worldly experience; in short, something over twenty-one, when the male of the species takes it as the insult of insults to be misjudged a boy.

His hair was short—Barbee always kept it close cropped—but for all that it persisted in curling, seeking to express itself in tight little rings everywhere; his eyes were very blue and very innocent, like a young girl's—and he was, all in all, just about as good-for-nothing a young rogue as you could find in a ten days' ride. Which is saying rather a good deal when it is understood that that ten days' ride may be through the cattle-country back of San Juan.

"Goin' to eat me alive?" demanded Barbee lightly. "Or roast me first?"

"For two cents," said Blenham slowly, "I'd forget you're just a kid an' slap your face!"

Barbee swept one of the fifty-cent-pieces from the table and tossed it to the foreman.

"You can keep the change out'n that," he said contemptuously.

It was nothing new in the experience of Blenham, could be nothing unforeseen for any ranch foreman, to have his authority called into question, to have a rebellious spirit defy him. If he sought to remain master, the foreman's answer must be always the same — and promptly given.

"Royce," said Blenham, his hesitation passed, "you're fired. Barbee, I'll take you on right now."

Few-worded was Blenham, a trick learned from his master. Across the room Bill Royce had floundered at last to his feet, crying out mightily:

"Hi! None o' that, Blenham. It's my fight, yours an' mine, with Barbee jus' buttin' in where he ain't asked. If you want trouble, take a man your size, full-grown. Blind as I am—and you know the how an' the why of it—I'm ready for you. Yes, ready an' anxious."

Here was diversion and the men in the bunk-house, drawing back against the walls, taking their chairs with them that there might be room for whatever went forward, gave their interest unstintedly; so completely that they did not hear Steve Packard singing far out in the night as he rode slowly toward the ranch-house.

"An' I'd rather hear a coyote howl
Than be the King of Rome!
An' when day comes—if day does come—
By cripes, I'm goin' home!
Back home! Hear me comin', boys?
Yeee! I said it. Comin' home!"

But in very brief time Steve Packard's loitering pace was exchanged for red-hot haste as the sounds winging outward from the bunk-house met him, stilled his singing and informed him that men were battling in a fury which must have something of sheer bloodthirst in it. He raced to the closed door, swung down from the saddle and threw the door open.

He saw Bill Royce being held by two men, fighting at them while he reviled a man whom Steve guessed to be Blenham; he saw Blenham and a curly-haired, blue-eyed boy struggling up and down, striking the savage blows of rage. He came just in time to see Blenham drive a big, brutal fist into the boy's face and to mark how Barbee fell heavily and for a little lay still.

The moment was charged with various emotions as though with contending electrical currents. Bill Royce, championed by a man he had never so much as seen, had given fully of his gratitude and — they meant the same thing to Bill Royce—of his love; after tonight he'd go to hell for "Yellow" Barbee.

Barbee, previsioning defeat at Blenham's hard hand, suffering in his youthful pride, had given birth, deep within him, to an undying hatred. And Blenham, for his own reasons and after his own fashion, was bursting with rage.

"Get up, Barbee," he yelled. "Get up an', so help me ——"

"I'm goin' to kill you, Blenham," said Barbee faintly, lifting himself a little, his blue eyes swimming. "With my hands or with a knife or with a gun or anyway, now or tomorrow or some time, I'm goin' to kill you."

"They all heard you," Blenham spat out furiously. "You're a fool, Barbee. Goin' to get up? Ever goin' to get up?"

"Turn me loose, boys," muttered Bill Royce. "I've waited long enough; I've stood enough. I been like a ol' woman. Jus' let me an' Blenham finish this."

They had, none of them, so much as noted Steve Packard's entrance. Now, however, he forced them to take stock of him.

"Bill Royce," he said sharply, "keep your shirt on. Barbee, you do the same. Blenham, you talk with me."

"You?" jeered Blenham. "You? Who the —— are you?"

"I'm the man on the job right now," answered Packard crisply. "And from now on, I'm running the Ranch Number Ten, if you want to know. If you want to know anything else, why then you don't happen to be foreman any longer. You're fired! As for foreman under me—my old pardner, Bill Royce, blind or not blind, has his old job back."

BILL ROYCE stared, dropped his jaw, gasped.

"You ain't — you ain't Stevie come back?" he whispered. "You ain't Stevie!"

With three strides Packard reached him, finding Bill Royce's hand with his.

"Right you are, Bill Royce," he cried warmly as at last his and Royce's hands locked hard.

"I'm fired, you say!" Blenham was storming, his eyes wide. "Fired? Who says so, I want to know?"

"I say so," returned Packard shortly.

"You?" shouted Blenham. "If you mean ol' man Packard has sent you to take my place just because— It's a lie; I don't believe it."

"This outfit doesn't happen to belong to old man Packard—yet," said Steve coolly. "Does it, Royce?"

"Not by a —— sight!" answered the blind man joyously. "An' it never will now, Steve! Not now."

Blenham looked mystified; rubbing his skinned knuckles, he glared from Steve to Royce, then to the other faces, no less puzzled than his own.

"Nobody can fire me but ol' man Packard," he muttered heavily, though his tone was troubled. "Without you got an order from him, all signed an' ready for me to read——"

"What I have," cut in Steve crisply, "is the bulge on the situation, Blenham. Ranch Number Ten doesn't belong to the old man; it is the property of his grandson, whose name is Steve Packard,— which also happens to be my name."

Blenham sneered.

"I don't believe it," he snapped. "Expect me to pull my freight at the say-so of the first stranger that blows in an' invites me to hand him my job?" He laughed into the newcomer's face. "If it happens that you are Steve Packard," he concluded bluntly, "what did you come around lookin' for a job for yesterday? Huh?"

Packard studied him a moment curiously, instinctively aware that the time might come when it would be well to have taken stock correctly of his grandfather's lieutenant. Then, before replying, he looked at the faces of the other men. When he spoke it was to them.

"Boys," he said quietly, "this outfit belongs to me. I am Steve Packard, the son of Philip Packard who owned Number Ten Ranch and who mortgaged it but did not sell it to his father—my grandfather. I've just got back home; I mean to have what is mine; I am going to pay the mortgage somehow. I haven't jumped in with my sleeves rolled up for trouble either; had Blenham been a white man instead of a brute and a bully he might have kept his job under me. But I guess you all know the sort of life he has been handing Royce, here. Bill taught me how to ride and shoot and fight and swim; pretty well everything I know that's worth knowing. Since I was a kid he's been the best friend I ever had. Anything else you boys would like to know?"

Barbee had risen slowly from the floor.

"Packard's son or the devil's," he said quickly, his eyes never leaving Blenham, "I'm with you."

The man whom, over the card-table, Barbee had addressed as Spotty and whose nickname had obviously been gained for him by the peculiar tufts of white hair in a young tousled head of very dark brown, cleared his throat and so drew all eyes to himself at his side of the room.

"Bill Royce bein' blind, if you could only prove somehow who you are—" he suggested, tone and expression plainly indicating his willingness, even eagerness, to be convinced.

"Even if I can't see him," said Royce, his own voice eager, "I know! An' I can prove it for my part by a couple of little questions—if you boys will take my word for it?"

"Shoot," said Spotty. "No man's called you a liar yet, Bill."

"Then, Stevie," said Royce, just a shade of anxiety in his look as his sightless eyes roved here and there, "answer me this: What was the first horse you ever rode?"

"A mare," said Steve. "Black Molly."

"Right!" and Royce's voice rang triumphantly. "Next: Who nailed the board over the door? The ol' cedar board?"

"I did. Just before I went away."

"An'," continued Royce, his voice lowered a trifle, "an' what did you say about it, Stevie? I was to know ——"

"Coach him up! Tell him what to say, why don't you?" jeered Blenham.

"I don't think I need to," replied Royce quietly. "Do I, Steve?"

"I was pretty much of a kid then, Bill," said Packard, a half smile coming into his eyes for the first time, a smile oddly gentle "I had been reading one of the Arabian Nights tales; that's what put it into my head."

"Go ahead, Steve; go ahead!"

"I said that I was going to seek my fortune up and down the world; that the board above the door would be a sign if all went well with me. That as long as I lived it would be there; if I died it would fall."

There wa a little, breathless silence. It was broken by Bill Royce's joyous laughter as Bill Royce's big hand smote his thigh.

"Right again, Steve! An' the ol' board's still there. Go look at it; it's still there."

Again all eyes sought Blenham. For a moment he stood still, looking about him. Then abruptly he swept up his hat and went out. And Barbee's laughter, like an evil echo of Royce's, followed him.

V

"HE'D as soon set fire to the hay-barns as not," said Royce. "Better watch him, Steve."

And so Steve, stepping outside, watched Blenham who had gone swiftly toward the ranch-house, and who now swung about sharply and stopped dead in his tracks.

"He's up to something, Bill," conceded Packard and called quietly to Blenham: "Every step you take on this ranch, I'm right along with you, Blenham."

Whereupon Blenham, his hesitation over, turned abruptly and went down to the corral, saddled and rode away.

On the heels of the irate foreman's wordless departure Steve Packard and Bill Royce went together to the old ranch-house, where, settled comfortably in two big armchairs, they talked far into the night. A sharp glance about him as he lighted a lamp on the table showed Packard dust and disuse everywhere excepting the few untidy signs of Blenham's recent occupancy.

An old saddle sprawled loosely upon the living-room floor, littered about with bits of leather and buckles; on the hearthstone were many cigaret stumps and an occasional cigar end. An open door showed a tumbled bed, the covers trailing to the floor.

"I'd give a year off my life for a good look at you, Steve," said Royce a trifle wistfully. "Let's see — thirty-five now, ain't you?"

"Yesterday," answered Packard.

"An' big?" asked Royce. "Six foot or better?"

"A shade better. About an inch and a half."

"Not heavy, though? Kind of lean an' long like Phil Packard before you?"

Packard nodded; then, with Royce's sightless eyes upon him, he said hastily:

"Right again, Bill; kind of lean and long. You'd know me."

"Sure I would!" cried Royce eagerly. "A man don't change so all-fired much in a dozen years; don't I remember just how you looked when you cut loose to see the world! Ain't made your pile, have you, Steve?"

Packard laughed carelessly.

"I'm lord and master of a good horse, saddle, bridle and seventy-odd bucks," he said lightly. "Not much of a pile, Bill."

"An' Number Ten Ranch," added Royce quickly.

"And Number Ten Ranch," Packard agreed, "if we can get away with it."

"Meaning what? How get away with it?"

"It's mortgaged to the hilt, it seems. I don't know for how much yet. The mortgage and a lot of unpaid interest has to be paid off. Just how big a job we've got to find out."

"Seen your grandfather yet?"

"No. I should have looked him up, I suppose, before I fired Blenham. But, being made of flesh and blood——"

"I know, I know." And Royce filled his lungs with a big sigh. "Bein' a Packard, you didn't wait all year to get where you was goin'. But there'll be plenty of red tape that can't be cut through; that'll have to be all untangled an' untied — unless your grandfather'll do the right thing by you an' call all ol' bets off an' give you a free hand an' a fresh start?"

"All of which you rather doubt, eh, Bill?"

Royce nodded gloomily.

"I guess we've gone at things sort of back-end-to," he said regretfully. "You'd ought to have seen him first, hadn't you? An' then you kicked his pet dawg in the slats when you canned Blenham. The old man's right apt to be sore, Steve."

"I shouldn't be surprized," agreed Steve. "Who are the Temples, Bill?"

"Who tol' you about the Temples?" came the quick counter question.

"Nobody. I stayed at their place last night."

Royce grunted.

"Didn't take you all year to find her, did it?" he offered bluntly.

"Who?" asked Packard in futile innocence.

"Terry Temple. The finest girl this side the pearly gates an' the pretties'. What kind of a man have you growned to be with the women, Steve?"

"No ladies' man, if that's what's worrying you, old pardner. I don't know a dozen girls in the world. I just asked to know about these people because they're right next-door to us and because they're newcomers, since my time."

Again Royce grunted, choosing his own explanation of Packard's interest. But, answering the question put to him, he replied briefly:

"That little Terry-girl can have anything I got; her mother was some class, too, they tell me. I dope it up she just died of shame when she come to know what sort she'd picked for a runnin' mate. An' as for him, he's a twisty-minded jellyfish. He's absolutely no good. An', if I ain't mistaken some considerable, you'll come to know him real well before long. Watch him, Steve."

"Well," said Packard as Royce broke off, sensing that this was not all to be said of Temple; "let's have it. What else about him?"

But Royce shook his head slowly, while his big thick fingers filled his pipe.

"We ain't got all night to jus' squat here an' gossip about our neighbors," he said presently. "There's other things to be said before things can be done. First rattle, an' to get goin', I'm much obliged for that little bluff you threw Blenham's way about me being your foreman. What you need an' what you got to have is a man with both eyes wide open. Oh, I know, Steve," as Packard started to speak. "You'd offer me the job if both my legs an' arms was gone, too. But it don't go."

"I'm going to need a man right away," argued Steve. "I'll have to do a lot of running around, I suppose, looking up the law, arranging for belated payments and so forth. I don't want to leave the ranch without a head. You know the men; you know the outfit."

But Royce, though his lips twitched, was firm.

"I don't know the men any too well either," he said. "They're all your grandfather's hirin'. But they're all live an' they all know the game. I won't swear as to how far you can trust any one of 'em; but you'll have to find that out for yourself as we go on."

"Name one of them for me," was Packard's quiet way of accepting his old foreman's ultimatum. "I'll put him on at least temporarily."

"There's Yellow Barbee," suggested Royce. "Somethin' of a kid, maybe kind of wild an' harum-scarum, maybe not worth much of a ——. But he ain't a Blenham man an' he did me a good turn."

Already Packard was on his feet, going to the door.

"Barbee!" he shouted. "Oh, Barbee!"

The bunk-house door opened, emitting its stream of light.

"Call me?" came Barbee's cool young voice, impudent now as always.

"Yes; come here a minute, will you?"

Barbee came, his wide hat far back upon his tight little curls, his swagger pronounced, his sweet blue eyes shining softly—his lips battered and bruised and already swelling.

"Come in and shut the door," said Packard.

BARBEE entered and stepped across the room to lounge with his elbow on the chimney-piece, looking curiously from Packard to Royce.

"I'm here to run this outfit myself, Barbee," Packard told him while returning the youth's regard steadily. "But I need a foreman to keep things going when I'm obliged to be away. I gave the job to Royce. He won't have it. He suggests you."

Barbee opened his eyes a trifle wider. Also the quick flush running up into his brown cheeks made him look more boyish than ever, giving him almost a cherubic air. But for all that he managed to appear tolerably unmoved, quite as if this were not the first time he had been offered such a position.

"How much is in it?" was what Barbee said, with vast indifference.

Steve hesitated. Then he frowned. And finally he laughed.

"You've got me there," he admitted frankly. "All the money I've got in the world tonight is right here." He spilled the contents of his pocket upon a table. "There's about seventy-five bucks. Unless I can turn a trick somewhere before pay-

day all you boys will have to take your *pro rata* out of that."

Bill Royce shifted nervously in his chair, opened his mouth, then closed it wordlessly. Barbee shrugged elaborately.

"I'll take a chance," he said. "It would be worth it if I lost; jus' to put one across on Blenham."

"All right!" And still Packard eyed young Barbee keenly, wondering just how much ability lay hidden under that somewhat unsatisfactory exterior. "You can go back to the boys now and tell them that you're boss when I'm not on hand. Before they go to work in the morning you show up here again and we'll talk a lot of things over."

Barbee ducked his head in token of acquiescence and perhaps to hide the glitter in his eyes, and walked on his heels to the door. Packard's voice arrested him there.

"Just one thing, Barbee: I don't want any trouble started. Not with Blenham or with any of old man Packard's men. I know how you feel, but if you work for me you'll have to let me be the one who starts things. Understand?"

The new foreman paused irresolutely. Then, without turning so that Packard might see his face, and with no spoken reply, he ducked his head again and went out, slamming the door after him.

"I ain't sure he's the right man for the job, Steve," began Royce a trifle anxiously. "An' I ain't sure whether he's square or crooked. But I don't know the rest of the men any better an'——"

"I'll watch him, Bill. And, as I've said already, I'm here to do most of the foreman act myself. We'll give Barbee his chance."

He came back to the table from whose top there winked up at him the few gold and silver coins which spelled his working capital, and stood looking at them quizzically.

"I got a yarn to spin, Stevie," came thoughtfully from Royce with a great puff of smoke. "You better listen in on it now—while we're alone."

Packard returned to his chair, made his own smoke and said quietly:

"Go to it, Bill. I'm listening."

"Barbee's gone, ain't he? An' the door shut?"

"Yes."

"THEN pull up close so's I won't have to talk loud an' I'll get it out of my system. Before your father died he wasn't makin' much money, not as much as he was spendin'. He'd tied into some minin' stock game that he didn't savvy any too well an' for a long time all I'd been clearin' here he'd been droppin' outside.

"An' the deeper he got in the hole the wilder he played the game; there was times when I didn't believe he cared a tinker's dam what happened. Whenever he needed any cash all he had to do was soak another plaster on the ranch, borrow again from his father. An' ol' Number Ten is plastered thick now, Steve; right square up to the hilt.

"Well, when Phil Packard died he did it like he'd done everything else, like he had lived, makin' a man think he was in a hurry to get a job over an' done with. Ridin' horseback one week an' the nex' week sendin' for me in there." He jerked his head toward a remote room of the big house. "An' he talked to me then about you."

Packard waited for him to go on, offering no comment. Royce, hunched over in his chair, straightened up a little, shook himself and continued:

"He had drawed some money out'n the bank, all he had left. I dunno what for, but anyways he had it under his pillow alongside his ol' Colt. An' he give it to me, sayin' he was caught sudden an' unexpected by his death, an' for me to take care of it an' see that you got it when you come back. It was in greenbacks, a little roll no bigger'n your thumb, an' when I counted 'em I near dropped dead. Ten little slips of paper, Steve, an' each spellin' one thousan' bucks! Ten thousan' dollars did Phil Packard slip me that night not a half-hour before he went over. For you. An' I got 'em for you, Steve; I got 'em safe for you."

His big shoulders rose and fell in a deep sigh; he ran a toil-hardened hand across his forehead. Packard opened his lips as if to speak, but was silent as Royce continued:

"I took the money, Steve, an' went outside for a smoke, an' my hands was shakin' like I was cold! Ten thousan' bucks in my tail pocket! It was a dark night an' I didn't lose nineteen secon's hidin' the wad in a good safe place. Which," slowly, "was the las' time I ever saw it!"

"I thought you said——"

"I got it safe? I have. But I ain't ever seen anything since that night, Steve. The

night your dad died, the night I hid the money, was the night I—went blind."

"You haven't told me about that yet, Bill," said Packard gently.

"No; but I'm goin' to now. It's part of the yarn I got to spin tonight. Like I said I took the wad—your father had slipped it back in a flat sort of pocketbook—an' went outside. It was night already an' dark. Ten thousan' bucks for me to keep safe for you!"

Again he ran his hand across his forehead.

"I knew where there was a rock in the corner foundation of the house that I could work loose; where if I put the greenbacks they wouldn't spoil if it rained or even if the house burned down. I stuck 'em in there, got the rock back like it was before, made sure nobody saw me an' went off by myself for a smoke.

" 'Cause why did I take that chance? I didn't take no chances a-tall, I tell you, Steve! How did I know, your father gettin' delirious at the finish which came downright quick, but he'd give the game away? An' on the ranch then there was men that would do mos' anything for ten thousan', give 'em the show.

"Your gran'father had come over an' he had brought Blenham with him an' his mechanic, Guy Little; an' there was a couple of new men in the outfit I'd picked up myself that I knew was tough gents.

"No! I didn't take no chances, seein' the money was yours an' not mine to fool with. I stuck it in the wall an' I sneaked off an' for three hours I squatted there in the dark with my gun in my hand, waitin' an' watchin'. Which was playing as safe as a man could, wasn't it, Steve?"

Packard got up and came to Royce's side, putting his hand gently on the foreman's shoulder.

"It strikes me you've done rather a good deal for me, Bill," he said quite simply.

"Maybe," said Royce thoughtfully. "But no more'n one pardner ought to do for another; no more'n you'd do for me, Stevie. Don't I know you? Give you the chance you'd do as much for me; eh, boy? Well, here's the rest of the story: Your dad was dead; ol' Hell-Fire was blowin' his nose so you'd hear it a mile an' I was feelin' weak an' sack-like, knowin' all of a sudden that Phil Packard had been —— good to me an' wantin' to tell him so now it was too late. Late an' dark as it was I went down to the bunk-house, tol' the boys to stick aroun' for orders in the mornin', saddled my horse and beat it for a quiet place where I could think. I never wanted to think so much in my life, Steve. Remember the ol' cabin by the big timber over on the east side?"

"The old McKittrick place? Yes."

"Well, I went there to make a fire in the ol' fireplace an' sit an' think things over. But I got to tell you about a feller name of Johnny Mills. You didn't know him; he's workin' for the Brocky Lane outfit, now. Well, Johnny was as good a cowman as you want, but you always had to watch him that he didn't slip off to go quail-huntin'. With a shotgun he was the best wing-shot I ever heard a man tell about.

"He used to sneak for the McKittrick cabin where he kep' an ol' muzzle-loadin' shotgun, an' shoot quail aroun' them springs up there when he'd ought to be workin'. Then he'd come in an' brag, tellin' how he'd never missed a shot. The boys, jus' to tease Johnny, had gone to the cabin that very day an' drawed his shot out, jus' leavin' the powder alone so Johnny would think he'd missed when he pulled the trigger an' no birdies dropped.

"See what I'm drivin' at? I tied my horse an' started along the little trail through the wild holly bushes to the cabin. Somebody was waitin' for me an' give me both barrels square in the face. That's when an' how my lights went out, Steve."

It came as a shock and Packard paled; Royce had been so long making his explanations and then put the actual catastrophe so baldly that for a moment his hearer sat speechless. Presently—

"Know who did it, Bill?" he asked.

"If I knew—for sure—I'd go get him! But I don't know; not for sure." His big hands clenched until they fairly trembled with their own tenseness. "It's —— to go blind, Steve!"

His hands relaxed; he sat still staring into that black nothingness which always engulfed him. When he spoke again it was drearily, hopelessly, like a man communing with his own sorrow, oblivious of a listener:

"Yes, it's fair —— to be blind. If there's anything worse I'd like to know what it might be. To be walkin' along in the dark, always in the dark—to stumble an' fall an' hear a man laugh—to pitch head firs' over a box that had been slipped quiet in your way——"

"Blenham did that sort of thing?" demanded Packard sharply.

It would have done Bill Royce good to see the look in his eyes then. Royce nodded.

"Blenham did whatever he could think of," he muttered colorlessly. "An' he could think of a good many things. Just the same—maybe some day——"

"And yet you stayed on, Bill?" when Royce's voice stopped.

"I'd promised your dad I'd be here—with the coin—when you come back. He knew an' I knew you might blow in an' blow out an' never get word unless I was right here all the time. An' ol' man Packard, after I was blind I went to him an' he promised I could stick as long as I just obeyed orders. Which I've done, by ——, no matter what they was.

"But the end's come now; ain't it, Steve, ol' pardner? But to get this tale tol' an' the money in your hands: I didn't know who'd tried to do for me, but I guessed it must have been some one who'd found out somehow about the ten thousan' an' thought I had it on me. When I come to at the cabin an' firs' thing tried to get a chaw of tobacco I foun' my pockets all turned wrong side out. It might have been Johnny Mills himself; he didn't know about the gun bein' fooled with; it might have been Blenham; it might have been Guy Little; it might have been somebody else. But I've thought all along an' I pray God I was right an' that some day I'll know, that it was Blenham."

He rose suddenly.

"Come ahead, Steve," he said, his voice matter of fact as of old. "It's up to you to ride herd on your own simoleons, now."

"You've left it in the same place? In the rock foundation-wall?"

"Yes. I couldn't find a safer place."

"And you haven't been back to it all these months?"

"Not until las' Saturday night. It was jus' six months then. I figgered it out I'd make sure once every six months. I went in the middle of the night an' made —— sure nobody followed me, Steve. Come ahead."

Packard slipped his arm through Royce's and they went side by side. The night was filled with stars; there was no moon. The wall, as they came around the corner of the house, shone palely here and there where a white surface glinted vaguely through the shadows.

"Nobody aroun', is there, Steve?" whispered Royce.

"Nobody," Packard assured him. "Where is it, Bill?"

Royce's hands, groping with the wall, rested at last upon a knob of stone near the base of the wall. He tugged; the stone, rudely squared, came away, leaving a gaping hole. Royce thrust his hand in, searched briefly and in a moment brought out a flat wallet clutched tightly.

"Yours, Steve!" he said then, a quick, palpitating note of pure joy in his cry. "Blind as I was, I put it over for you! Here's ten thousan', Steve. An' the chance to get ol' Number Ten back."

Packard was taking the wallet proffered him. Suddenly Royce jerked it back.

"Let me make sure again," he said hastily. "Let me be dead sure I've made good."

He fumbled with the wallet, opened the flap, drew out the contents, a neat pack of folded bank-notes. He counted slowly.

"Ten of 'em," he announced triumphantly as he gave the wallet over to its proper owner.

Packard took them and they went back to the house. The rays of the lamp met them; through the open door, back to the living-room they walked side by side. The table between them, they sat down. Packard put the wallet down, spread out the ten bank-notes.

"Bill," he said, and there was a queer note in his voice, "Bill, you've gone through —— for me. Don't I know it? And you say I'd do as much for you? Are you sure of it, Bill?"

Royce laughed and rubbed his hands together.

"Dead sure, Stevie," he said.

Packard's eyes dropped to the table. Before him were the ten crisp bank-notes. Each was for one dollar. Ten dollars in all. His heritage, saved to him by Bill Royce.

"Bill, old man," he said slowly, "you've taught me how to play the game. Pray God I can be as white with a pardner as you have been."

And, crumpling the notes with a sudden gesture, he thrust them into his pocket.

VI

IT WAS perhaps eight o'clock, the morning blue, cloudless and still. Packard had conferred briefly with Barbee; the

Ranch Number Ten men had gone about their work. Steve and Bill Royce, riding side by side, had mounted one of the flat, treeless hills in the upper valley and were now sitting silent while Royce fumbled with his pipe and Steve sent a long eager look down across the open meadow-lands dotted with grazing cattle.

Suddenly their two horses and the other horses browsing in a lower field jerked up their heads, all ears pricked forward. And yet Steve had heard no sound to mar the perfect serenity of the young day. He turned his head a little, listening.

Then, from some remote distance, there floated to him a sound strangely incongruous here in the early stillness, a subdued screech or scream, a wild, clamorous, shrieking noise which for the life of him he could not catalog.

It was faint because it came across so great a distance, and yet it was clear; it was not the throbbing cry of a mountain-lion, not the scream of a horse stricken with its death, nothing that he had ever heard, and yet it suggested both of these sounds.

"Bill!" he began.

"I heard it," Royce muttered. "An' I've heard it before! In a minute——"

Royce broke off. The sound, stilled a second, came again, seeming already much closer and more hideous. Steve's horse snorted and plunged; some of the colts in the pasture flung up their heels and fled with streaming manes and tails. Royce calmly filled and lighted his pipe.

Stillness again for perhaps ten or twenty seconds, Steve, about to demand an explanation from his companion, stared as once more came the shrieking noise.

"You can hear the blame thing ten miles," grunted Royce. "It's only about half that far away now. Keep your eye glued on the road across the valley where it comes out'n Bird Cañon."

And then Steve understood. Into the clear air across the valley rose a growing cloud of dust; through it, out of the cañon's shadows and into the sunlight, shot a glistening automobile, hardly more than a bright streak as it sped along the curving down-grade.

"Terry Temple?" gasped young Packard.

Royce merely grunted again.

"Jus' you watch," was all he said.

And, needing no invitation, Packard watched. The motor-car's siren—he had never heard another like it, knew that such a thing would not be tolerated in any of the world's traffic centers—sounded again a long wailing note which went across the valley in billowing echoes.

Then it grew silent as, with the last of the dangerous curves behind it, the long-bodied roadster swung into the valley. Packard, an experienced driver himself with his own share of reckless blood, opened his mouth and stared.

It was hard to believe that the big, spinning wheels were on the ground at all; the machine seemed more like an aeroplane content with skimming the earth but hungry for speed. Only the way in which it plunged and lurched and swerved and plunged again testified to highly inflated tires battling with ruts and chuck-holes.

"The fool!" he cried as the car negotiated a turn on two wheels with never a sign of lessened speed. "He'll turn turtle. He's doing sixty miles an hour right now. And on these roads——"

"More likely doin' seventy-five," grunted Royce. "Can do ten better'n that. Out on the highway he's done a clean hundred. That car, my boy——"

"He's going into the ditch!" exclaimed Steve excitedly.

The car, racing on, was already near enough for Steve to make out its two passengers, a man bent over the steering-wheel, another man, or boy, for the figure was small, clinging wildly to his place on the running-board, seeming always in imminent danger of being thrown off.

"He's drunk!" snapped Packard angrily. "Of all blind idiots!"

Another strident blast from the horn that sent staid old cows scurrying this way and that to get out of the way, and the car swerved from the road and took to the open field, headed straight toward the hill where the two horsemen were. Jerking his horse about, Steve rode down to meet the new arrivals. And then——

"My ——! It's my grandfather! He's gone mad, Bill Royce!"

"No madder'n usual," was Royce's comment. But Steve did not hear him.

The car had come to a sudden stop. The man on the running-board—he had a man's face, keen and sharp-eyed and eager, and the body of a slight boy—jumped down from his place and in a flash had disappeared under the engine. The man at the wheel

straightened up and got down, stretching his legs. Steve, swinging down from his saddle, and coming forward, measured him with wondering eyes.

And he was a man for men to look at, was old man Packard. Full of years, he was no less full of vigor, hale and stalwart and breathing power. A great white beard, cut square, fell across his full chest; his white mustache was curled upward now as fiercely as fifty years ago, when he was a man for women to look at, too.

He was dressed as Steve had always seen him, in black corduroy breeches, high black boots, broad black hat. A man standing upward of six feet, carrying himself as straight as a ramrod, his chest as powerful as a blacksmith's bellows, the calf of his leg as thick as many a man's thigh. Big, hard hands, the fingers twisted by toil; the face weatherbeaten like an old sea captain's with eyes like the frozen blue of a clear Winter sky.

His voice when he spoke boomed out suddenly, deep and rich and hearty.

"Stephen?" he demanded.

Steve said "yes" and put out his hand, his eyes shining, the surprizing realization upon him that he was tremendously glad to see his father's father once more. The old man took the proffered hand into a hard-locked grip and for a moment held it while, the other hand on his grandson's shoulder, he looked steadily into Steve's eyes.

"What sort of man have they made 'of you, boy?" he asked bluntly. "There's the makings of fool, crook an' white man in all of us. What for a man are you?"

Steve flushed a little under the direct piercing look, but said steadily—

"Not a crook, I hope."

"That's something, if it ain't everything," snorted the old man as, withdrawing his hand, he found and lighted a long stogie. "Blenham tells me you fired him las' night?"

Young Packard nodded, watching his grandfather's face for the first sign of opposition. But just now the old man's face told nothing.

"Thinking of runnin' the outfit yourself, Stephen?" came the next question quietly.

"Yes. I had intended looking in on you in a day or so to talk matters over. I understand that my father left everything to me and that it is pretty heavily mortgaged to you."

"Uhuh. I let Phil have a right smart bit of money on Number Ten firs' an' las', my boy. Don't want to pay it off this mornin', do you?"

Steve laughed.

"I'm broke, grandy," he said lightly, unconsciously adopting the old title for the man who had made him love him and hate him a score of times. "My working capital, estimated last night, runs about seventy-five dollars. That wouldn't quite turn the trick, would it?"

The old man's eyes narrowed preceptibly.

"You mean that seventy-five dollars is all you've got to show for twelve years?" he asked sharply.

Again, hardly understanding why, Steve flushed. Was a man to be ashamed that he had not amassed wealth, especially when there had never been in him the sustained desire for gold? He owed no man a cent, he made his own way, he asked no favors—and yet there was a glint of defiance in his eye, a hint of defiance in his tone when he replied briefly:

"That's all. I haven't measured life in dollars and cents."

"Then you've missed a —— good measure for it, my son! I ain't sayin' it's the only one, but it'll do firs' class. But you needn't get scared I've gone into the preaching business. An' with that seventy-five dollars you're startin' out to run a big cow outfit like this, are you?"

There was a gleam of mockery in the clear blue eyes which Steve gave no sign of seeing.

"I've got a big job on my hands and I know it," he said quietly. "But I'm going to see it through."

"There's no question about the size of the job! It's life-size, man's size—Number Ten size, if you want to put it that way. It wants a real man to shove it across. Know just how much you're mortgaged for?"

"No; I was going to ask you."

"Close to fifty thousan' dollars, countin' back interest, unpaid. More'n you ever saw in a day, I reckon."

Steve shrugged. This to hide his first inclination to whistle. Fifty thousand—why, he didn't know Number Ten Ranch was worth that much money. But it must be worth a good deal more if his grandfather had put that much out on it.

"It is a nice little pile," he admitted carelessly.

The old man grunted, thrust his hands

into his pockets and drew deeply at his stogie. Steve rolled a cigaret. In the silence falling upon them they could hear the sound of the mechanician's wrench.

"Anything wrong with the car?" asked Steve for the sake of breaking unpleasant silence.

"Not that I know of. He's jus' takin' a peek to make sure, I guess. That's what he's for. He knows I got to get back to my place in a couple of shakes."

Steve smiled; by wagon-road his grandfather's ranch home was fifty miles to the northward.

"You won't think of going back before noon."

"Won't I? But I will, though, son; Blenham's sticking aroun' waitin' for my say-so what he'll do nex'." He snapped open a big watch and stared at it a moment with pursed lips. "I'll be back home in jus' one hour an' a half. All I got is fifteen minutes to talk with you this mornin'."

"You mean that you can drive those fifty miles in an hour and a quarter!"

"Have done it in less; if I was in a hurry I'd do it in an hour flat. But, allowin' for time out, I want fifteen minutes more'n that. And now, if we're goin' to get anywhere——"

HE stopped suddenly and stood toying with his big watch, passing it back and forth through the loop he made of its heavy chain, his gaze steady and earnest and searching upon his grandson.

"Stephen," he said, abruptly, "I ain't playin' any favorites in my ol' age. An' I ain't givin' away big chunks of money hit or miss. You wasn't countin' on anything like that, was you?"

"No, I wasn't," announced Steve quickly. "I remember your old theory: that a man should make his own way unaided; that——"

"That whatever he got he's got to get with his one head an' one set of han's. Now, the things I got to say I'll spit out one at a time. Firs', I'd like to have you come visit me for a spell at my place. Will you do it? Today, tomorrow, any time you feel like it."

"Yes; I'll be glad to."

"That's good. Nex', not even if you was the right man for the job, you can't save this ranch now; it's too late; there's too much to dig up in too short a time. I've got my hooks in deep an' whenever that happens I don't let go. I want you to quit before you get started."

Steve looked his surprize.

"Surely," he said wonderingly, "you don't want me to give you the ranch just because you happen to hold the mortgages on it?"

"Business is business, Stephen," said the old man sternly. "Sometimes, between Packards, business is —— It'd be that for you. I've started out to get this outfit an' I'd get it. An', doin' it, I'd be wastin' your time besides breakin' you all to smithereens. Better drop it."

Steve had hardly expected this. But he answered calmly, even lightly—

"I think I'd like a try at holding it."

"That's two things," old man Packard said crisply. "Number three is this here: Blenham tells me you've put Royce in as foreman under you?"

"I offered him the place. He could have it yet if he wanted it. But he refused. I've passed the job on to a man named Barbee."

"Barbee!" cried the old man. "Barbee! That yellow canary bird? Meaning him?"

"Yes," retorted Steve a trifle stiffly. "Anything wrong with him?"

"I didn't roll them fifty miles to talk about jay birds an' canary birds an' such," growled his grandfather. "But here's one thing I've got to say: This ranch is goin' to be mine real —— soon; that's in the cards, face up. It's as good as mine now. I've been runnin' it myself for six months. I want it right, hear me? What do you know about running a big outfit? What does a kid without whiskers like Barbee know about it? Think I want it all run down in the heel when it comes to me? No, sir! I don't! Blenham knows the lay of the land; Blenham knows my ways, Blenham knows how to run things. I want you to put Blenham back on the job!"

Steve bit his lip, biting back a hot reply.

"Grandfather," he said slowly, "suppose we take a little more time in getting squared around? I want to do what's right; I know that you want to do what's fair and square. I am willing to consult you about ranch matters; I'll come to you for advice, if you'll let me; I'll try to keep the ranch up to time and—" with a smile—"in my hands and out of yours. That's a good sporting proposition. But as for Blenham——"

"Put him back as foreman and I'll talk fair with you. I want Blenham back here, Stephen. Understand that?"

"And," cried Steve a trifle heatedly at last, "I tell you that I am going to run the ranch myself, and that I don't like Blenham."

"—— it!" cried the old man violently. "Hear the boy! Don't like Blenham, huh? Goin' to run the ranch yourself, huh? Why, I tell you it's as good as mine right now! How are you goin' to pay your men? How are you goin' to buy grub for 'em? Where are you goin' to find runnin' expense money? Go an' tell folks you're mortgaged to me for fifty thousan' dollars an' see how much they'll stake you for on top of that. Or come over my way an' try to borrow some more, if you think I'm an easy guy. Why, Steve Packard, you—you're a —— fool!"

"Thanks," said Steve dryly. "I've heard that before."

"An' you'll hear it again, by the Lord! in ten languages, if you'll find men talkin' that many lingos. Here I come chasin' all this way to be decent to you, to see if there ain't some way to help you out——"

"Help me out of my property," amended Steve stiffly. "I can't remember anything else you offered to do for me!"

"I said it once!" shouted his grandfather, his two big fists suddenly clenched and lifted threateningly. "You're a howlin' young ass! That's what for a man you've turned out to be, Stephen Packard. Come here empty-handed an' try to buck me, would you? Me who has busted better men than you all my life, me who has got my hooks in you deep already, me who ain't nò pulin' ol' dodderin' softy to turn over to a lazy, shif'less vagabond all I've piled up year after year. Buck me, would you? Tuck in an' fire my men, butt in on my affairs— Why, you impudent young puppy-dog, you: I'll make you stick your tail between your legs an' howl like a coyote before I'm done with you!"

Steve looked at him hopelessly; he might have expected this. All along he had hoped for amity at least. If there were to be a conflict of purpose he could have wished that it be conducted in friendly fashion. But when did Hell-Fire Packard ever clasp hands with the man he opposed in anything? When did he ever see a business rival without cloven hoof, horns and spiked tail?

"I am sorry you look at it that way, grandy. It is only natural that I should seek to hold what is mine."

"Then hold your tongue, you young fool!" blazed out the old man. "But don't ask me to hold my hand! I'm goin' after you tooth and big toe-nail! If Ranch Number Ten ain't mine in all partic'lars before you're a year older I want to know why!"

"I think," said the grandson, fighting with himself for calmness and quiet speech, "that any further business I can take up with your lawyer. Past due interest——"

"Lawyer?" thundered Packard senior. "Since when did I ever have call for law an' lawyers in my play? Think I'm a crook, sir? Mean to insinuate I'm a crook?"

"I mean nothing of the kind. A mortgage is a legal matter, the payment of interest and principal——"

"Guy Little!" called the old man. "Guy Little! Goin' to stay under that car all day?"

The mechanician promptly appeared, hands and face greasy and black, and took his place on the running-board.

"All ready, sir," he announced imperturbably.

With half a dozen strides his master reached the car; in as many seconds the powerful engine was throbbing. The screaming horn gave warning; the quiet herds in the valley heeded, lifted their heads and stood at attention, ready to scamper this way or that as need arose. The wheels turned, the car jolted over the inequalities presented by the field, swerved sharply, turned gathered speed and whizzed away, back toward the valley road.

THREE times before they shot back into the mouth of Blue Bird Cañon the mechanician fancied that his employer had spoken; each time listening, he failed to catch any other sound than that made by the engine and speeding wheels. Once he said "Sir?" and got only silence for an answer.

He shook his head and wondered; it was not Packard's way to mumble to himself. And again, ready to jump for his life as the big car took a dangerous turn, his eyes glued to the sheer bank a few inches from the singing tires, he caught a sound through the blast of the horn which surely must have come from the driver's lips.

"What say?" yelled Guy Little.

No answer. He caught a fleeting glimpse of a farmer at the head of his two plunging horses where the man had hurriedly got them out of the way and up the flank of the mountain. They raced on. And again, surely Packard had said something.

"Talkin' to me?" called Little.

Then, for just a wee fraction of a second, Packard drew his eyes from the road and his look met the mechanician's. The old man's eyes were shining strangely.

"—— it, Guy Little," he boomed out boisterously, "can't a man laugh when he feels thataway?"

And it suddenly dawned upon Guy Little that ever since they had left Ranch Number Ten the old man had been chuckling delightedly.

VII

THE little town of Red Creek had an individuality all its own. It might have prided itself, had it any civic sense whatever, upon its aloofness. It stood apart from the rest of the world, at a safe distance from any of its rival settlements, even drawn apart as if distrustfully from its own railroad station, which baked and blistered in the sun a good half-mile to the west. Grown up here haphazardly long before the "Gap" had been won through by the "iron trail," it ignored the beckoning of the glistening rails and refused to extend itself toward the traffic artery.

More than all this, Red Creek gave the impression, not in the least incorrect, of falling apart into two watchful sections which eyed each other suspiciously, being cynically and unsociably inclined. Its main street was as wide as Van Ness Avenue and down the middle of it, like a border line between two hostile camps, sprawled a stream which shared its name with the town.

The banks here and there were the brick-red of a soil whose chief mineral was iron; here and there were screened by willows. There were two insecure-looking bridges across which men went infrequently.

For the spirit which had brooded over the birth of Red Creek when a sheepman from the north and a cow-man from the south had set their shacks opposite each other, lived on now; long after the old feuds were dead and the whole of the grazing lands had been won over to the cattle raisers, a new basis for quarrels having offered itself at Red Creek's need.

Much of this Steve Packard knew, since it was so in his time, before he had gone wandering; much he had learned from Barbee in a long talk with him before riding the twenty-five miles into the village. Old Man Packard had drawn to himself a host of retainers since his interests were big, his hired-men many, his wages generous.

And, throughout the countryside across which he cast his shadow, he had cultivated and grown a goodly crop of enemies, men with whom he had contended, men whom he had branded sweepingly as liars and thieves and cutthroats, men whose mortgages he had taken, men whom, in the big game which he played, he had broken. The northern half of Red Creek was usually and significantly known as Packard's town; the southern half sold liquor and merchandise, offered food and lodging, to men who harbored few friendly feelings for Packard's "crowd."

Hence, in Red Creek were two saloons, confronting each other across the red scar of the creek; two stores, two lunch-counters, two blacksmith shops, each eying its rival jealously. At this time the post-office had been secured by the Packard faction; the opposition snorted contempt and called attention to the fact that the constable resided with them. Thus honors were even.

Steve Packard rode into town in the late afternoon, his motive clear-cut, his need urgent. If Blenham had stolen his ten thousand dollars, for which he had so imperative a call now, then Blenham had been the one who had replaced the large bank-notes with the small; there was the chance that Blenham, just a week ago tonight, had gotten the dollar bills in Red Creek. If such were the case Packard meant to know it.

"There are things, Barbee," he had said bluntly, "which I can't tell you yet; I don't know you well enough. But this I can say: I am out to get Blenham's tag."

"So'm I," said Barbee.

"That's one reason you've got the job you're holding down right now. Here's one point though, which it's up to you to know: I very much suspect that for reasons of his own Blenham hasn't set foot for the

last time on Ranch Number Ten. He'll come back; he'll come snooping around at night; he'll perhaps have a way of knowing the first night I'm away and come then. There's something he left there that he wants. And while I am away you're foreman, Barbee."

A flickering light danced in Barbee's blue eyes.

"Orders from you, if Blenham shows up at night——"

"To throw a gun on him and run him out! The quickest way. Tonight I want you to squat out under a tree and keep awake—all night. For which you can have two days off if you want."

"If I thought he'd show"—the boy's voice was little more than an eager whisper, —"I couldn't sleep if I tried!"

Then Packard had spoken a little about Red Creek, asking his few questions, and had learned that Blenham had his friends in "Packard's Town" where Dan Hodges of the Ace of Diamonds saloon was an old pal, that "Whitey" Wimble of the Old Trusty saloon across the street hated both Hodges and Blenham like poison.

"Us boys," added Barbee, "always hung out at the Ace of Diamonds, bein' Packard's men. After now, when I go on a rampage, I'm goin' to make frien's across the street. Frien's sometimes comes in handy in Red Creek," he added smilingly.

The road, as one comes into Red Creek from the east, divides at the first bridge, one fork becoming the northern half of the intersected street, the other the southern half. Steve Packard, filling his eyes with the two rows of similar shacks, hesitated briefly.

Until now he had always gone to the Packard side; when a boy he had regarded the rival section with high contempt, looking upon it as inferior, sneering at it as a thoroughbred might lift lip at an unworthy mongrel. The prejudice was old and deep-rooted; he felt a subtle sense of shame, as if the eyes of the world were upon him, watching to see him turn toward the "low-down skunks an' varmints" which his grandfather had named these denizens of the defamed section.

The hesitation was brief; he reined his horse to the left, impatiently riding straight toward the flaunting sign upon the lofty false front of the Old Trusty saloon. But, short as was his indecision, it had not ended before he had glimpsed at the far end of the street the incongruous lines of an automobile—red racing type.

"Boyd-Merril. Twin Eight," thought Packard. "So we'll meet on the same side after all, Miss Terry Pert!"

There were seeds of content in the thought. If it were to be range war between him and his grandfather, then since obviously the Temples had already been drawn into contention with old man Packard, it was just as well the fates decreed that he and Terry should be on the same side of the fence, the same side of the fight, the same side of Red Creek.

He tickled his horse with a light spur; despite the manner of their last encounter he could look forward with something akin to eagerness to another meeting. For, he told himself carelessly, she amused him vastly.

But the meeting was not just yet. He saw Terry, jauntily, even saucily dressed, as she came out of the store and jumped into her car, marked how the bright sunlight winked from her high boots, how it flamed upon her gay red scarf, how it glinted from a burnished steel buckle in her hat band. As bright as a sunbeam herself, loving gay colors about her, it seemed to him that across the distance she fairly shone and twinkled.

There was a faint shadow of regret in his eyes as she let in the clutch and whizzed away. She was headed down the street, her back to him, driving toward the remote railroad station. Off to the north he saw a growing plume of black smoke.

"Going away?" he wondered. "Or just meeting some one?"

BUT he had come into Red Creek on a business in no way connected with Terry Temple. He drew eyes and speculation away from the occupant of the red car.

He had figured it out that Blenham, if it had been Blenham who had chanced on Bill Royce's secret and no longer ago than last Saturday night, would have wasted no time in acquiring the one-dollar bills for his trick of substitution; that if he had come for them to Red Creek that same night, after post-office and stores were closed, he would have sought them at one of the two saloons; that, since currency is at all times scarce in cattle-towns in the

West, he might have had to go to both saloons for them.

Packard began investigations at the Old Trusty saloon, whose doors stood invitingly open to the faint afternoon breeze.

In the long room half a dozen idle men looked up at him with mild interest, withdrawing their eyes briefly from solitaire or newspaper or cribbage game or whatever had been holding their careless attention as he entered.

A glance at them showed him no familiar face. He turned to the bar.

Behind it a man was polishing glasses with quick, skilful hands. Steve knew him at once for Whitey Wimble. He was a pronounced albino, unhealthy looking, with over-large, thin ears, small pale eyes and teeth that looked like chalk. Steve nodded to him and spun a dollar on the bar.

"Have something," he suggested.

Wimble returned his nod, left off his polishing to shove forward a couple of the glistening glasses and produced a bottle from behind him.

"Regards," he said apathetically, taking his whisky with the enthusiasm and expression of a man stedfastly obeying his doctor's orders. "Stranger in Red Creek?"

"I haven't been here," Steve answered, "for several years. I never saw the town any quieter. Used to be a rather gay little place, didn't it?"

"It's early yet," said Whitey, going back to his interrupted task. "Bein' Saturday, the boys from the ranches will be showin' up before long. Then it ain't always so quiet."

Packard made his cigaret, lighted it and then said casually—"How are you fixed for dollar bills in your strong-box?"

"Nary," returned Whitey Wimble without troubling himself to look into his till. "We don't see over much rag money in Red Creek."

"Guess that's so," admitted Steve. "They do come in handy though sometimes; when you want to send a dollar in a letter or something of that kind."

"That's a fac', too; never thought of that."

Which, since he never wrote or received letters, was no doubt true.

"Men around here don't have much use for paper money, do they?" continued Packard carelessly, his interest seeming to center in his cigaret smoke. "I'd bet a man the drinks nobody else has asked you for a dollar bill for the last six months."

"You'd lose," said Whitey. "I had three of 'em in the drawer for a coon's age; feller asked me for 'em jus' the other night."

"Yes?" He masked his eagerness as he thrust a quarter forward. "The drink's on me then. Let me have a cigar."

Whitey also took a cigar, indicating friendliwise the better box.

"Who was it asked you for the paper money?" Steve went on. "He might have one he doesn't need."

"It was Stumpy Collins. The bootblack across the street."

"I'll look him up; yesterday he had them, you say?"

Wimble shook his head, gave the matter his thought a moment and said:

"It was las' Saturday night; I remember 'cause there was a right smart crowd in an' I was busy an' Stumpy kep' pesterin' me until I 'tended to him. He won't have nothin' lef' by this, though; it ain't Stumpy's way to save his money long. Firs' time I ever knowed him to have three dollars all at once."

From the Old Trusty, Steve went across the street, leaving his horse in front of Wimble's door, where there was a big poplar and a grateful shade. Crossing the second of the two bridges he turned his eyes toward the railroad station; the red touring-car stood forth brilliantly in the sunshine, a freight train was just pulling in, Terry was not to be seen.

"She'll eat before she starts back home," he thought, hastening his stride on to Hodges' place, the Ace of Diamonds. "I'll see her at the lunch-counter."

Tucked in beside the Ace of Diamonds was a bootblack stand, a crazy, home-made affair with dusty seat. The wielder of the brush and polish was nowhere in evidence. Steve passed and turned in at the saloon door, wishing to come to Hodges, Blenham's pal. For it required little imagination to suspect that it had been Hodges at Blenham's behest, or Blenham himself, who had sent Stumpy across the street to the Old Trusty.

Here, as in Wimble's place, a few men loitered idly; here, as there, the proprieter stood behind his own bar. Hodges, a short, squat man with a prize-fighter's throat, chest and shoulders and a wide, thin-

lipped mouth, leaned forward in dirty shirt-sleeves, chewing at a moist cigar-stump.

"Hello, stranger," he offered offhandedly. "What's the word?"

"Know Blenham, don't you?" asked Steve quietly. "Works for old man Packard."

"Sure, I know him. What about him?"

"Seen him lately?"

"If you call ten minutes ago lately. Why? Want him?"

Packard had not counted on this, having no idea that Blenham was in town. He hesitated, then said quickly:

"Hasn't left yet, has he? Where is he now?"

"Down to the depot. Trailin' a skirt. An' some skirt, too, take it from me."

He laughed.

Steve wanted suddenly to slap the broad, ugly face. Since, however, he could formulate no logically sufficient reason for the act, he said instead:

"Maybe I'll see him before I pull out. If I don't, ask him if he lost a wad like this?"

Fleetingly he flashed the little roll of banknotes before Hodges' eyes.

"Greenbacks?" asked Hodges, "How much?"

Packard laughed.

"Not so all-fired much," he said lightly. "But more than enough to buy a hat!"

"If hats are sellin' ten dollars or under?" ventured Hodges.

Packard affected to look surprized.

"What do you know about how much is in this roll?" he demanded innocently.

"One dollar bills?" said Hodges. "Ten of 'em?"

"You don't look like a mind-reader."

"Well, you're right about the wad bein' Blenham's. Leave it with me, if you want. I'll see he gets it. There ain't enough there for a man to steal," he added reassuringly.

"How do you know it's Blenham's? If he told you that he had lost it he'd have told you where. What's the answer; where did I pick this up?"

"Blenham didn't say he los' nothin'. But I know it's his because he got most of them bills from me."

"Tell me when," and Packard held the roll in a tight shut hand, "and I'll leave them with you."

"Las' Saturday night," said Hodges, after a brief moment of reflection.

Packard tossed the little roll to the bar.

"There's the money. Tell Blenham I thought it was his!"

He turned to the door, his blood suddenly stirred with certainty; Blenham had stolen the ten thousand dollars, and the theft had been committed no longer ago than last Saturday night. Just a week—there was the chance——

"Hey, there," called Hodges. "Who'll I say lef' this? What name, stranger?"

Steve turned and regarded him coolly.

"Tell him Steve Packard called. Steve Packard, boss of Ranch Number Ten."

And Dan Hodges, dull wit that he was, felt that something was wrong. The look in the stranger's eyes had altered swiftly; the eyes had grown hard. Steve went out. As he reached the sidewalk he glimpsed a red automobile racing townward from the station. Behind it, riding in its dust, came Blenham.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE DESERT-BORN

By HELEN H. PIERCE

MINE is the solitude of desert spaces,
Unmarred, untainted, gloriously free;
The luring loneliness of silent places—
All this is as the breath of life to me!

Grant to the weak the peace of gentle weather,
A life lapped round with idleness and ease;
But oh! For me the creak of saddle leather,
The pant of a spend horse against my knees.

No splendor like the morning radiance blending
Opal and rose in iridescent flame,
The fragrant smoke of camp-fire high ascending
As incense to the One All-Holy Name.

I love to thread forgotten coulees, lying
Hot in the noon-day beat of desert sun,
Thrill to the rattler's death-drum, and replying,
The swift, reverberant echo of my gun.

The desert stars swing comradely around me—
No other jewels half so wonder-bright—
The desert-darkness, mother-wise, hath wound me
Safe in her velvet mantle all the night.

I want no other home, no other lover,
No other comforting than my content,
No kiss but the caressing winds that hover,
No roof but the wide-arching firmament.

None but the desert-born may know the luring
In the wild pungency of trampled sage—
None but the strong, the free-souled, the enduring
Taste of the desert's glorious heritage!

A PREJUDICE AGAINST SUICIDE

GEORGE M. A. CAIN

JESS PURDUE, pulling heavily on the wheel of his husky catboat to resist the rudder strain of running down the wind, had great difficulty in resisting the temptation to burst into guffaws of laughter. That, it seemed, was about the one thing which could dull the extreme point of the wonderful joke.

It had never occurred to him that he would hesitate at using any means he could devise to remove from his path a human being who got too much in his way. That the victim himself, however, should push open the doors to a trap by which he could be sent to his last conscious moment dead sure that he was not being murdered, but believing that he owed a debt of unspeakable gratitude to him, Jess Purdue . . .

Well, that was Jess's idea of the supreme jest of his career.

"It all comes o' bein' so —— stuck on himself that he thinks a man can't help likin' him even after he's went an' took away his girl."

"Beg pardon, captain, did you say something?" There was an eager conciliatoriness in young Hasting's manner. His attitude was beyond Purdue's comprehension. A man of wider and clearer perceptions would have recognized in Billy Hasting one of those cheerful democrats who may acquire other ambitions but can never entirely get over the born desire to make friends with anything showing an even remote resemblance to the human.

Purdue started guiltily, stared searchingly into Hasting's face before he made reply:

"Jest talkin' to myself, I reckon. I— I was thinkin' it was a pity you and me hadn't got acquainted earlier in the Summer."

It was obviously almost on the tip of Hasting's tongue that the lateness of their acquaintance was not due to any fault in his behavior. He avoided the possibly unpleasant and let it go with:

"Wish we had. If I'd had this ride eight weeks ago, I imagine I'd go home a more enthusiastic water-man. This is really fun. I'll know what kind of a boat to buy next season, anyhow, only I have a feeling a man needs your experience to handle a thing like this."

"He ought to know how to swim well before he tries," Purdue vouchsafed in response.

He was amusedly aware that the other's avowal of enthusiasm for his boat was at least partly an indirect compliment to its owner, not considering the hint at his superior handling of it.

"He knows so —— well I'd ought to kill him," was the fisherman's inward comment, "that he don't dare quite hope I really ain't goin' to."

"Smoke?" Hasting invited a moment

later, proffering his gold cigaret-case, "or, would you rather have a cigar? Think I've got one somewhere."

Purdue's impulse was to refuse. All through, this play of being chummy came as near to being hard on his nerves as any detail of the deed he planned. Being friendly was not the easiest thing in the world for him, and with a man he hated and intended to keep right on hating, it was real work. He took the cigaret Hasting offered.

—— Hasting anyhow. Why couldn't the fool shut up and not keep a man pretending to smile and trying to answer questions? Oh, well, it wouldn't take over an hour to get across to the point standing high and clear in the fresh air, just beyond one of the inter-island channels of the Bay of Fundy. He could almost see the old maids' bungalow below the top of the bluff.

Every one else from Mananlico called it Ward's cabin, but Purdue had rechristened it for the season after he had made the discovery that it was being occupied this year by a pair of school-teachers with a mania for photography which had brought them hurrying down to snap his boat every time he had gone near the point.

Poor school-marms, they little knew that they were to have a part in today's affair. If old "Cappy" Ward had lived to stay at his cabin that year, Purdue woud have had to go farther. The school-teachers kept no boat, could not have handled one in these waters if they had it, but their alertness for new pictures, especially with the *Jessie P.'s* big sail in them, was another part of the phenomenal luck that had backed Purdue thus far with his scheme. Not that there was going to be anything about it to make them useful as formal, sworn witnesses. Their part would be that of voluntary testimony to his heroism in his efforts to save his companion.

Right opposite that point, where the wind came strongest from the south of the island, along the north of which they now skirted while the tide ran like a mill-race against it, the *Jessie P.* was going to capsize. Her mast might or might not break when it hit the water. A new mast would, perhaps, cost him as much as ten dollars. Before tomorrow's sun-up, her owner, in a borrowed dory, would have got the wreck towed to where it could be righted.

For an ordinary swimmer, unfamiliar with the shore, a lot of good luck would be needed to escape a fatal battering on the rocks. For Purdue the thing would be mere child's-play. He knew where the big break in the outer fringe of rocks would afford a perfectly smooth passage to the comparative safety behind them.

Hasting did not know how to swim at all.

If, as Purdue expected, the New Yorker got blanketed by the sail or tied down by the sheet-lines, Purdue could well afford the strength to make a few futile dives before himself swimming to shore and safety. If Hasting managed to keep free and to cling for a while to the hull, Purdue would talk encouragingly and help him hold. When Hasting's strength was gone and he was practically drowned anyhow, Purdue would even essay to get him ashore. In either case a little play of extreme exhaustion would demonstrate to the two school-teachers that he had all but given his own life to save that of his companion.

Ten dollars for a mast, perhaps a wetting, a half-way stiff swim, and he could go back to Rose Gardiner as her deepest sympathizer in the loss of her Summer lover. He had been Enoch Arden enough to surrender his own hopes for the sake of her happiness, enough even to become friendly with his successful rival, enough to make a desperate effort to save his rival's life at the risk of his own.

WELL, in view of the fact that Rose, besides being the beauty of Mananlico, was the only child of old Captain Gardiner, whose two big schooners had not earned him less than a thousand dollars a month for the past four and a half years of war prices on shipping and were, even in ordinary times, still good value for ten thousand dollars apiece, Jess Purdue was cheerfully willing to admit that he had spent more and worked harder to salvage a lot less of value. His only real wish was that he had discovered Hasting's inability to swim five or six weeks earlier.

Away back then, within two weeks of Hasting's arrival as one of the very few Summer boarders the island fishing village attracted, as soon, in fact, as he had ascertained that the New Yorker purposed remaining through the season, Purdue had known that the Maine coast was not long enough to contain both of them. Before Hasting had come, Purdue had regarded Rose Gardiner as his girl. To be sure, she had never displayed any great enthusiasm for his attentions, but she had not rejected them.

To understand accurately just what his place in Rose's life had been, one must have known Mananlico, or one of several thousand country communities where love and marriage are worked out on about the same system. In such a place, to attend one or two church sociables and half a dozen evening services with a given young man is accepted as indicating distinct preference for his attentions. If the given young man happens to have a reputation for asserting and defending his rights, a girl is pretty likely to be left to him thenceforth or until, at least, there are clear evidences given that, for one reason or other, that particular young man's attentions have ceased or have been halted.

Jess Purdue had become a factor in Rose Gardiner's life just after her quarrel with Newt Williams over the failure of the latter young man to keep a pledge he had taken. Purdue was of a handsome, dare-devil type which seems always to fascinate women. Even if his strength of character was of rather evil repute, it contrasted with her former lover's weakness and profited by the comparison. Incidentally, other young men were slow in risking suit for the hand of Captain Gardiner's daughter, whose wealth and two years at a city academy discouraged them. Purdue had interested her long enough to secure for himself the requisite outward appearance of a favored suitor.

Incidentally, he was liked by the captain. Purdue was a money-getter and not far from the beginnings of the accumulation of riches. Captain Gardiner loved neither the agents of prohibition nor the fisheries inspectors. He was of a mind capable of approving the enterprize that succeeded in profitable evasions of fish and game laws and the smuggling of red liquor across the Bay.

Under these circumstances Rose had not put a stop to Purdue's attentions. Perhaps she had not made sure that she was ready to stop them permanently. Even Purdue's self-esteem had not betrayed him into forcing those attentions to a point where she had to decide definitely for or against them. He had been fairly comfortable in the hope that eventually he would win her to complete acceptance. Then Hasting, fresh from the war, had yielded to his father's insistence that the business at home must wait while he spent a Summer in recovery from the imaginary effects of two slight and entirely healed wounds.

To a youth of Hasting's breeding, Rose Gardiner must have appeared the only real girl in the village. After two years of France, it was simply inevitable that he should fall in love with any available young woman. In spite of the difference between his four years of college and her two at a Portland academy, and his father's half million and her father's tenth of that amount, he might have gone much farther and done worse in the matter of selecting an object for love. She had made the most of those two years. He could take her home with him and not be ashamed to introduce her as his wife. This was exactly what he was intending to do from the beginning of about the fifteenth minute after they had met.

It is not unreasonable to assume that she was not more than a minute or two later in reaching a point where she was unwilling to admit even to herself that a man like Jess Purdue had ever won a moment's consideration. If there had been no other differences, that between Hasting's all-inclusive amiability of disposition and Jess's hard selfishness would have been enough. The two were not to be mentioned in the same breath; it would insult a love for Hasting to acknowledge that any feeling for Purdue had ever existed in the same heart that held it.

Some of this had been apparent very soon to Jess Purdue—enough so that inside ten days the village bully, a hulking brute by the name of William Durrance, had accosted Hasting in front of

the post-office and, a trifle thickly, opened conversation.

"Say, you, I been lookin' to tell you that you're through associatin' with Rose Gardiner."

Hasting looked up three full inches into the face of the first enemy he had seen since the signing of the armistice. Enemies, outside of wars ordained by higher powers, were not in his line. Here was absolutely the first one with whom he felt not the slightest inclination to fraternize. His feelings must have astonished him almost as much as the other's words. It was several seconds before he replied:

"I can't say I've been looking for you, but, if I'd supposed there was anything like you on earth that dared to mention the name of that young lady, I'd have looked for you good and hard. I'll give you ten seconds to apologize. Now—do it quick!"

Bill Durrance's answer had been a rush, with a terrific blow aimed at the slightly snubbed nose of Hasting. Hasting had learned quite a bit of boxing, and Durrance's blow had connected with space. So many things happened to Bill Durrance before he was ready to begin another that he forgot to begin it at all. The only persons he had bullied since were his mother and Jess Purdue—the latter with petty blackmail.

THIS was one of the reasons why Purdue now wished he had found out sooner that Hasting did not number swimming among his accomplishments and made no serious attempt to learn it in water which was too cold for anything but short plunges. The other reason was that the succeeding weeks had shown Purdue absolutely no other safe and sane method of eliminating his successful rival. Probably Rose had been too much in love with Hasting at the start to love anybody who could do him harm. Incidentally, though Purdue was counted a strong man, he had no wish to mix things with one who had so thoroughly beaten a citizen like Durrance.

Hasting seemed never to have suspected the fact that Purdue had been back of the assault on his person. He had taken for granted that Durrance was himself a distant, misguided admirer of the girl. He would not have insulted Rose by asking about such a lout. Later he had probably learned that his success in love was a disappointment to Purdue. He had never shown anything but sympathy for that disappointment. All Summer he had been making efforts to get acquainted with the man. Purdue had never returned a greeting until that accidental discovery that his rival could not swim.

Hasting's refusal to give up the effort to make friends with Purdue could have no other reason than his innate liking for everybody. He simply didn't want an enemy in the world—not even Durrance, since he had thrashed that bully. Besides, the fact that Purdue had been somewhat attentive to Rose had indicated to Hasting that Purdue must possess some worthy traits. As Hasting felt that henceforth he would become a more or less frequent visitor to the village, and as Mananlico contained all too few men worthy to know Rose Gardiner, he wanted all those few as friends.

Of course little details, fine touches that would give finish to his big jest, had developed in Purdue's mind during the fortnight after he had made that illumining discovery about Hasting's glaring deficiency in aquatics. The main plan had leaped, full grown, into his brain the instant he heard the city man declare that he could not swim a stroke. Hardly a moment later, Hasting had turned around, seen Purdue and nodded as ever before. Then, for the first time, Purdue had mumbled some acknowledgment of recognition.

Surprized, apparently pleased, Hasting had opened a conversation on the spot. Purdue had avoided too sudden a change of front and avoided anything resembling effusiveness. He had never needed to meet the other half-way. Hasting was willing to make all the advances his former rival would accept. To bring about a conversation on the respective merits of gas and sail as means of propulsion was easy.

There were plenty of people who maintained that Purdue's advocacy of sail was of a piece with his liking for a black hull. Sailboats make no betraying noises. Black hulls are hard to see on dark nights. A lot of folk knew that

the big, weather-blackened canvas which Purdue kept for a cover was in shape a perfect duplicate of the white sail of his big cat, and that Purdue kept his sail bent to the spars by no more permanent tying than is used on larger vessels for topsails that have to be put on and taken off with the shifts of the wind.

Purdue was fairly sure that Hasting had asked for the pleasure of a sail on his boat with much the same kind of interest as that with which grown folk ask children to show their toys. The motive of the request worried Purdue not at all. The important fact was that not less than four people had heard Hasting make it.

That he was carrying full sail in a breeze which called for reefing would never be brought against him. Every one was used to seeing him crowd on all the canvas he could carry. He had picked the day himself, of course. It was but the second since Hasting's request. The day before had been so foggy nobody would have cared to sail for pleasure. Even the weather had played into his hands.

Now fate dealt him the joker. As he drew near the point he had chosen for his carefully planned accidental killing, he saw both the school-teachers running down the rocks toward the beach. Not another boat showed within five miles. The cards could not have been stacked better.

"We'll jibe her over now," he said, as Hasting started to shift his position a little to make it easier to meet the jerky movements of the boat in the chop where wind met tide. "Watch out for your head! Sit still!" he commanded as the other started to change with him to the other side of the boat.

He wanted Hasting on the lee side when they went over; that would increase his chances of going under the sail.

"Oh," the other agreed with a smile. "You'll have to tell me everything. The little experience I've had with boats has come this Summer with that baby launch of mine." He smiled deprecatingly. "Next Summer I'm going to have one of these. Do you suppose I'll be able to get some one to teach me to sail her?"

Purdue smiled. He could not help it.

"C'n you hold the wheel just as she is a minute?" he demanded. An idea had flashed upon him. Hasting should upset the boat by his own blunder.

IT was time for a bit of nice seamanship. It is doubtful if any amount of skill would have made a safe job of the jibe in that wind. Purdue certainly would never have undertaken it with any other purpose than that of upsetting. The point was to capsize at the right spot.

To turn the boat over in the center of the tide-rip would mean chasing it for miles out to sea and would add real difficulties to the matter of saving himself. Less than the *Jessie P.'s* length beyond the rip's edge was a submerged rock. To run to within six feet of that rock and then shift in time to miss it as the boat careened would be easy enough for the man who knew his boat as he knew how to walk.

The little vessel heeled far over even as Purdue swiftly hauled in the sheet, and Hasting nearly slipped from his seat as he tried to hold the wheel. Purdue grinned. If she did that now, while her own headway was to be subtracted from the wind's force, there was little question as to what would happen when the headway was almost gone and the wind snapped into the sail from the other side.

Hasting's present position was one from which he would not be able to recover quickly. To climb out of the cockpit hastily without becoming entangled in the snarl of lines would be impossible. With the long boom pulled parallel to the keel and the sail snapping like a pack of giant crackers, Purdue waited a second.

"Now—port a little—quick!" he yelled.

Then, with a quiver of alarm, he realized that he was talking to an utter landsman.

"To the left! To the left!" he shrieked.

For an instant it had not been so hard to hold the wheel. As he caught the idea that something was to be done to it, Hasting had half risen and turned about so that he was facing it. His left, as he squatted before it, was the boat's right. On his own little boat the wheel was in

front of him when he faced as they ran. He had caught the alarm in Purdue's tone and he turned quickly.

With an oath Purdue had leaped. He caught the wheel too late and tripped in the length of line which hung from his hand into the loose coil at his feet. The line was jerked from his grip.

He recovered it and held it smoking on the skin of his hand, but not until half its length had been shot through the pulleys, and not until the jerk of the boom was timed exactly with the thud of the centerboard below them on the edge of the rock. There was a crash forward. The mast had snapped off at the deck like a pipe-stem. The great sail flattened over the water.

The *Jessie P.* was still upright, her centerboard probably badly splintered at the bottom and forward edge, but her hull as sound as the day it had been built. Only her power to move was gone. There was, even here, enough of the tide current to catch the heavy keel and what remained of the centerboard and set the boat, slowly at first, then more and more swiftly, moving away from the land toward the wide-open mouth of the Bay of Fundy.

During the first instant of wild rage at the failure of his scheme, the damage to his boat and the startled wonder at it all, the two school-ma'ams on the shore had shouted their willingness to run for help. His mind was not sufficiently adjusted to the lightning change in the situation to realize that he wanted help, that it would be an hour before they could get down to the next village and start a launch in their direction.

"We're all right," he had sung back at them, carefully smothering the oaths of fury he had been on the point of venting. "Won't need no help!"

They had barely drifted far enough to make calling impossible when he saw a swiftly approaching bank of fog which, inside half an hour, might shut their predicament from the view of the world.

Gone now was all pretense of friendship; he gave vent to the vast hate his sullen nature had accumulated within him, vented it in torrents of vile epithet while he began to busy himself with salvaging the sail and the two unbroken spars. At the worst there was no serious danger, and he knew it. There were tins of food in a little locker in the cabin, kept there against more usual emergencies. Beside the jug of water drawn from a spring just before they had started, a big cask lay on the under-deck before the cabin. That he filled religiously with fresh water once a week, and its contents were but three days old now.

Their gravest danger was no more than that of staying out all night. Even that might be avoided. For two strong men, a very few hours would suffice for removing the butt of the mast and stepping what was left of it to carry a reefed sail. His hate, however, saw an opportunity to torment his rival with fear.

Hasting, aware that he had provided plenty of excuse for exasperation, was taking the rabid invectives in the apologetic manner of one all but impossible to anger.

"Go ahead and cuss me," he advised with imperturbable good humor. "Any man who's idiot enough to make a break like that can't be sufficiently cussed. He deserves more cussing than there is."

Hasting might have explained; Purdue knew the explanation himself. It was pure tact that simply waited for wrath to cool.

"When you get out of breath, tell me, and I'll do some cussing myself. I picked up some rather good ones over in France. Not quite good enough for me, but they'll help. Only, if there's anything you can tell me in words of one syllable, I'll be glad to help with that mess."

"Help! Help ——!" shrilled Jess Purdue's harsh voice. "Think I'd let you touch a line now? You ——! You've helped enough! I got plenty of time to do everything myself. See that fog-bank yonder? Well, that's good for about three days, and this current will take us about a hundred miles off shore and out of the run of everything, in that time. No need for any of your help—or your lip. Just sit there and keep your mouth shut. Don't dry it in the air. We only got that little jug of water between us."

Hasting looked at the bank of fog.

All Summer long he had been staying ashore when he had planned to run out in his little motor-boat, because of banks of fog that stayed and stayed for days on end. Still . . .

"Hadn't I better fasten a rag to that boat-hook and wave it, or something before——"

"You'd better sit still," snarled the owner of the disabled boat.

HASTING sat still. He thought for a while. His mind came around to what Purdue had said about the jug of water. He eyed it for a moment, then he licked his lips. Thinking of it made him thirsty, but he must not drink because of any ordinary thirst.

Purdue saw that slight protrusion of the other's tongue and a new idea was born in his brain. He began to ease up with the invective. He replaced it with tales of the fierce thirsts of men lost at sea without fresh water. What time his brain was not busy with the invention and elaboration of these, he developed his plan.

The first real move toward the execution of his new scheme came an hour and a half later when the sail and its boom and gaff had been got aboard, the mast still floating alongside, held by the one stay which had not snapped when it had gone overboard. By that time everything a hundred yards away from the boat was blotted out by the fog. By that time, too, he had moderated his tirade to a point where something more hopeful would not sound too preposterous.

"Say," he exclaimed, "mebbe we c'n do somethin' yet. That mast ain't splintered bad. The two of us ought to be able to get it up again. There's enough of it left to carry the sail double reefed —mebbe better'n that. C'm on, let's heave her aboard."

He watched Hasting as the city man helped with a will. He was a strong man himself, but he became confirmed in the opinion that this rich young dude was not for him to remove by ordinary violence. Dark came down before their task was finished—a blind, wet dark that soon made even the white of the sail on the restepped mast, with but a single reef to shorten its length, invisible. Purdue lifted the water-jug to his lips and drank deeply.

"No need to worry over that now," he said, passing it to Hasting.

It was half empty when Hasting lowered it from his parched mouth. Purdue had accepted the other's explanation and was acting good-natured to the extent of his ability. Before taking his seat in the stern, he brought out a heavy jacket from the cabin and put it on. Hasting realized that he had neglected to remove the light sweater he wore and was now perspiring rather dangerously to face the night chill.

"Better climb into the cabin," Purdue suggested. "There's a big canvas in there you can lay on or wrap around you. It'll take us till one or two o'clock to make shore."

Ten minutes later he laid a pocket compass on the seat beside him and held an electric torch far enough from it to avoid influencing its needle. He laid his course almost due southeast. His new plan required time. Its first step was accomplished.

Long after daylight he heard Hasting getting up for the third time. He knew it would be to stay up now. The compass was back in his pocket when his passenger emerged from the hatch. The fog still held, blowing in great drifts.

"We ain't in yet."

Purdue acknowledged the very obvious.

"No," Hasting agreed, eying him sympathetically. "You must be tired."

He yawned, looked about an instant, spied the water-jug and started for it.

"I'm used to nights out," Purdue mentioned by way of deprecating any need for sympathy on ground of weariness, "but you better go easy on that water. There ain't but about a cupful left. I got to admit now I ain't quite sure where we are. I ain't had nothin' but the wind to steer by. If it should 'a' shifted durin' the night, we might be a long ways from home yet.

"Most generally I bring along a compass but I took it up to the house night before last and didn't figger on needin' it for this little trip. Looks like you ain't got nothin' on me for bein' a bonehead. You got a right to make a mistake or two. I'd oughta be shot f'r leaving that there compass to home."

Hasting set down the light jug of water without wetting his lips and looked rather blankly at the gray haze.

"I'm goin' with the wind now to see if that don't bring us in sound of a fog-horn somewheres."

Purdue explained what Hasting probably would not have noticed anyhow.

"We ain't exactly provisioned for crossin' the ocean."

After a few moments of silence Hasting got out his cigaret-case. As ever, he held it out to Purdue, then helped him to a light before lighting his own cigaret. Then he inhaled three or four deep draughts of the smoke. His eyes went back again to the water-jug.

"Can't stand that," he said suddenly, flinging the half-finished weed from him. "Only makes me thirstier."

Purdue agreed with him and followed his example in getting rid of the cigaret. He, too, had to endure some thirst, though he had drunk all he wanted and eaten his fill during the night. Before he could get another real drink, he must have carried out his program with Hasting, and that required a sight of the sun.

FORLORN, silent hours followed. The haze thinned a little.

"Hold the wheel a minute. I got a sextant aboard, if I ain't got a compass. If that sun comes out we'll know where we are in a hurry."

He got out a blackened box containing a sextant and other instruments, the purpose of which Hasting could only guess.

At length the gray disk of the sun became distinguishable, faded before Purdue could adjust the sextant, and then appeared again. This time he made the motions of getting a sight. He took a book of navigation tables from the box. With a pencil he figured on the seat beside him.

"My God!" he gasped effectively.

"What—what—" Hasting stammered.

"Wait till I c'n do that again," Purdue bade him.

He was accomplishing a splendid imitation of worry in look and voice. Hasting lost some of his healthy color.

Purdue again went through the motions of shooting the sun, as seamen call it, and again he figured.

"But it can't be," he muttered just loud enough to seem to talk to himself and yet to be distinctly heard. "What time you got?" he asked aloud, with a well-managed tremor in his voice.

Hasting looked at his watch.

"Twelve to ten," he replied.

"Sure?" urged Purdue. Hasting looked again and a hopeless expression crossed his face.

"I forgot to wind it last night," he spoke despairingly. "It's stopped."

Purdue had known that the watch had not been wound during the night, otherwise he might have omitted that detail of the program.

"It's twelve minutes after two," he said positively. "That wind's only a p'int from due west, but it must have been east most of the night. Even at that, God knows how we've got here."

"Where?" Hasting inquired fearfully.

"They's a chart in the cabin. I'll tell you in a minute," he said.

Something in his tone conveyed that he wanted to put off the telling. He came back from the cabin with the chart already unrolled. He flattened it further across the bench. His black finger-nail indicated a point far over to the right of the map.

"There's where we are—" he spoke with a sort of awed fierceness—"right there. Forty-two, twenty, north and sixty-six, fifty-one west. We've come a hundred and fifty mile away from any land as straight as we could make it. The nearest port's Yarmouth. This here is one of them regular west blows we get about three times a Summer. It's good for no less'n three days, an' that means we got to beat as much of the way home as we ever live to make."

The real truth was that it was then half past ten in the morning, the wind was eastward and the real reason for Purdue's hasty turn-about was the fear that the whoop of the Machias Seal Island whistle might reach Hasting's ears at any moment, or that a sudden rift in the fog should reveal that they were near the shore of Manan Island. Still graver was the danger that some other vessel's horn should start Hasting shouting for aid.

Purdue had made no real attempt to learn anything by his view of the sun, taken with neither time nor compass, without one or the other of which his instru-

ment was of no value for reckoning. All he really knew had been gathered from his last look at the compass three hours earlier, coupled with the sound of a certain very familiar bell and his expert judgment as to the speed at which they had been running since he had got that data. He might be a mile or two out of the way.

He knew they were not ten miles from land in three directions. He was soon adding to those miles as best he might in the face of the wind, but he was none of your timid liars who can not look you in the eye and lie convincingly.

Hasting said nothing. His eyes sought the water-jug once more. They were growing bloodshot.

He was uncomfortably aware that he had not eaten since noon of yesterday, but the hunger was forgotten in thirst. Purdue waited until Hasting's eyes came back once more to the jug under the seat.

"Better take a swallow of the water," he suggested. "We got to drink sometimes."

Hasting needed no second invitation. The jug was at his lips. He trembled with eagerness—still more with a fear that he could not control the desire to drink the last drop the vessel contained.

"Hold on," Purdue interrupted as he tilted the jug at his lips.

"I didn't get any yet," Hasting protested.

"You—you didn't?" the seaman managed to falter. "Well, that's so much the worse. Don't swallow more'n a teaspoonful. Hold it in your mouth as long as you can. Who-o-up! No, I won't drink none now. I'm used to it. Say, look here, mate——"

He broke off until Hasting croaked an encouraging—

"Well?"

"YOU got to sail this boat in yourself," Purdue said in a tone that indicated an approach to a subject rather than the main statement of it.

"Why—why—what for?"

Hasting had given a single glance forward. Now that they were running with the wind on a forward quarter, the weather seemed almost appallingly rough to him. He shifted his glance to Purdue and failed to see any signs of such inability as should make it necessary for him to risk his inexperience.

Purdue nodded at the jug.

"Water," he began enigmatically. Then he explained. "It's goin' to take not less than four days to make port. It looks now as if we was goin' purty fast, but remember we got to beat it back and forth and we're not covering our course near half the speed we're goin' through the water. Four days 'd mean nothin' short of miraculous good luck. Gettin' picked up anywhere near here would be another miracle. We're off the ships' path and away from all the fishin' grounds. The truth is that the chance of gettin' water in four days ain't wu'th the torture of waitin' for it.

"They's about a teacup of water left there. Well, it's about enough to keep a man alive four days, if he don't take more'n three teaspoonfuls a day. A man can keep alive doin' that if he's as strong as you are to start the game. It ain't no pleasure trip—nothin' like it—but it's better'n bein' dead.

"Two men, though, couldn't pull through on it, so there you are. We can't both live. Since I'm the captain and you're the passenger, it's up to me to pervide for you as best I can. You take this here wheel and I'll give you all I can of sailin' knowledge in a couple of hours, then I'm goin' overboard into plenty of water. I won't be thirsty no longer, and you won't die of thirst if you're careful."

Eagerly he watched Hasting's face. He saw at least half of what he had hoped to see and he heard:

"The deuce you say! Do I get you right? You mean that you're going to drown yourself in order to leave me with enough water to last until I can get to land? The —— you will!"

"Nothin' else to it," Purdue came back stoutly. "I wouldn't live through the sufferin' of makin' that jug last two of us two days on the chance that I'd have two days on top of it with no water at all."

"Well, I would," Hasting spoke positively, "a long sight sooner than——"

"Say," Purdue hastily interrupted, "you ain't never been real thirsty. You think you're pretty thirsty now. Well, I've seen just twenty hours more of going

dry than what we've had so far, and I c'n tell you you ain't begun to feel it yet. This here's a case of one man dyin' or two. I'd a —— sight rather be the one to die easy than one of the two to die of thirst. That's all there is to it."

"Oh, no, it's not." Hasting now spoke more easily. "If one of us has to go, there's only one of us that can really give the other a chance by going. I'd have this boat tipped over in ten minutes. You know how to sail her."

"I'm captain—you're passenger," reiterated Purdue.

"Just as bad to desert your ship and your passenger as to let him jump overboard. I'll go. I—I guess I'll go right now."

Hasting got up from his seat and looked at the boiling surge of water. Water! Purdue could see that the idea had caught well at last, but he had more to get from this young man than the mere riddance of him. He held on, therefore, with more argument. Then he wished he hadn't.

"All right," Hasting suddenly offered, "we'll draw cuts for it. I'll break a match. If you draw the head of it, you go overboard. If I get it, I go."

His hand fumbled in his pocket. At length he brought out a match. Purdue watched every move for a second or two until he saw that Hasting had got out half of another match with the whole one, and that it was the half without the head. Mentally he resolved to practise the trick for different use. He drew, knowing that neither of the little sticks protruding from Hasting's fingers had a head on it, then Hasting triumphantly showed the third stick.

"I win," he said quite calmly.

Purdue did not grin. It took real effort to avoid it as he saw Hasting's clumsy movement to get rid of the extra piece of match-stick.

"You—you wouldn't happen to wanter write some little message to anybody, would you?" he suggested then. "I got a pencil. If you ain't got no other paper, you c'n tear a piece off the chart. I was figerrin' on givin' you a note to show that I'd gone of my own accord, if anybody should ask questions."

"Why," Hasting exclaimed, "I'll do that of course. And—I think I'll write a couple of other notes, too. I hate to tear up a good chart but——"

"Go ahead! I can get another chart quick enough," Purdue urged. Then he watched while Hasting wrote. The first note was practically a certificate as to the manner of his death. It was the second which Purdue's far-sighted eyes read across the boat's cockpit with a feeling that his fortune was really unbelievable. It was addressed to Rose Gardiner. The particularly cheering paragraph ran:

> Purdue insisted on going, but I made him draw cuts about it and fooled him into thinking I had won the overboard prize. I think I'll still have to pretend to learn something of sailing and surprize him with a leap when he isn't looking. I know I can't sail this boat home. He's a very real man, Rose—more of a man than I. He never dreamed I'd take it that I should go when he told me why he wanted to teach me to run his boat.
>
> I suppose this looks a little like suicide, but I hardly think it merits all the blame for the cowardice that rightly belongs to suicide. I am thirsty enough now to realize that some sufferings are——

It was as the swift pencil reached this point that Purdue hastily shifted his gaze from it. Hasting had paused and looked up. The city man held the tip of the pencil to his lips, a thoughtful pucker between his reddened eyes. He looked down and seemed to reread what he had written.

Purdue waited. Meanwhile he inwardly gloated over the effect that letter would produce. It would do all he could have hoped to accomplish by having those two school-teachers as witnesses of a bluffed heroic attempt at a rescue.

The rest of his plan would be simplicity itself. He would really run well out to sea, then he would saw off two feet more of the mast and drop it to where it would give color to a tale of inability to make headway. If either of the remaining notes mentioned the lack of a compass, he would have to throw away one that had cost as much as a new mast was going to cost. Of course, a little before making land or being rescued, there would be the water-cask to get rid of. There were a dozen ways of attending to that.

Oh, he had been too shrewd for fate. If he couldn't get what he wanted one

way, he could devise another. He was no common, cheap murderer. He made the victim do for himself.

"SAY, Purdue." Hasting's voice held a note that alarmed the other. What had the fellow discovered?

"You know I can't quite see this," the city man said slowly. "I—I guess I've got too much of a prejudice against suicide. The way you put it and the way it looked to me at first, this particular instance seemed to show killing yourself as a means of saving the other fellow.

"Well, I'm not specially religious, of course, but I got trained by an old minister my father hired as tutor for me when I was a rather sickly kid and unfit for school. I've never got over believing there is a real God and that He made some pretty rigid laws. I expect I've bent them up a bit, like the rest of men, but——

"My old teacher said there was no moral difference between killing one's self and killing somebody else. Either one was breaking the law against murder. Of course there are arguments for killing a man as you would a sick dog, to get him out of his misery, but we don't do it. We haven't a right to kill ourselves to get out of our misery—not if God's law is really solid.

"Anyhow, I'm not going to do it, Purdue. No, you need not worry about the water. I'm not going to take any more of it, not if you try to pour it down my throat. Don't waste it trying.

"I'm going back into the cabin where I can't see that darned jug. I'll lie down and sleep, if I can, and lie still anyhow, when I can't sleep. I don't imagine I'll last more than a day or two if it's going to get much worse than this, but I'd rather stand a couple of days of hell here than take any chances of it forever. I suppose there's a little chance of my going crazy over it. If I do, just tap me over the head with the handle of that short boat-hook. Don't be so gentle as to take a chance of my coming to again right away. Understand?"

He had made enough of a speech to give Purdue time to get the answer.

"Well, I said I'd go in the first place. That's all right. I ain't got no religious trainin' to worry about. I ain't goin' to suffer no hells here to dodge them I ain't never seen."

"If you go overboard, I'll throw that jug in after you for a life-preserver," Hasting promptly countered. Then he started for the cabin hatch.

"You come back here!" snarled Purdue. "—— if I'm goin' to set here and let a man die of thirst while I got a drop of water left. Come back here an' take this wheel. I'm——"

"Purdue," said the other calmly, "I'm a trifle weak with thirst and hunger already. And so, I reckon, are you. I could have licked you when I got into your boat, and I can do it yet. You give me your word of honor that you'll stick here, or I'll beat you silly and then tie you fast so you can't get overboard anyhow. Then I'll make you drink that water to keep you alive so you can direct my handling of the boat."

He stood over Purdue, clinging to the centerboard trunk for balance. He reached for the short boat-hook.

"I—I—" stammered Purdue, frightened by the other's calm which might mean as thorough madness as fiercer bluster.

"Promise!" ordered Hasting.

"I—yes, I promise," Purdue hurried to agree.

Hasting went down the hatch. Once more he stretched himself at the forward end of the cabin, on the folds of the weather-blackened old sail. He lay so that the centerboard trunk cut off his view of that side of the cockpit Purdue occupied. He lay across the door, through the bulkhead into the space under the forward deck.

In his rage over this unexpected twist, Purdue lost the grip on himself that had kept him so long from the water-jug. Aware that the other could not see him do it, he finished its contents in two great gulps. Beside his share of the water, Purdue had drunk a half pint of whisky during the night. His thirst had become monstrous during the day, repressible only by constant recalling of the big prize to be gained by endurance.

The little water in the jug seemed hardly more than an aggravation of his thirst. Of all human, physical tortures, perhaps none is more under the sway of mind and imagination than that from

which he suffered. Purdue was lacking in neither imagination or other varieties of thought. These had kept him strong to wait for the big drink that would be his the moment Hasting had gone overboard. Now his thirst was intensified by the knowledge that, between him and the big drink, lay a stronger man than he, ready to be the one to die if need be, but hardly to be counted on to take knowingly and calmly an entirely unnecessary death of slow torture.

PURDUE fought off the thirst, strove to forget it. For a little it seemed that he had succeeded. Then it came back again. As the boat breasted a wave aslant, a drop of salt spray touched his lip. He caught it with his tongue, tasted its salt. For a second or two the fog above turned red before his eyes and spun about him; the gray of the water below was brown, and it swayed as no ocean ever swayed.

His brain was cracking already. He snatched up the empty jug, pressed it to his lips, held it, waiting for the precious last drops. They came, seemed to dry up in his mouth and leave nothing for him to swallow. He hurled the jug over into the sea.

God! He oughtn't to have done that! He ought to have kept that jug to show how empty it was when he got back and they demanded that he account for Hasting. How would he prove that he hadn't deliberately destroyed the supply of water?

Going mad! ——! He had no right to be thirsty as that yet. He had drunk his fill not six hours ago, and more than half a cupful within the last half hour. It was all imagination. Once more he got possession of himself. He sat still and tried to devote his whole attention to the task of steering to avoid taking the combers of the waves into the cockpit. The task did not need his whole attention.

How was the other standing it? Maybe he had succeeded in going to sleep. Purdue put the boat about and got on the other side. From his seat he could look right through the cabin-door into the face of Hasting. Hasting's eyes were closed.

Asleep! Asleep! Now!

Hasting's eyes contracted; he shifted his position and licked his lips.

Asleep nothing. —— him! —— him! —— him and his cant about suicide! Of course he couldn't—wouldn't sleep.

If he did, what good would it do? He wouldn't stay asleep while a man dragged him away from that bulkhead and its door and hauled out the cask. He studied that door. There was no chance of getting into it, not without moving Hasting a good three feet back.

The door had worse effect on him than the jug had had on Hasting. Behind it was, not a swallow of water, but gallons of water—gallons—gallons—plenty to drink and drink for hours and plenty to leave for other hours. Just behind that door—just behind that . . .

Bah! He'd kill the —— dude. What was he afraid of? He'd slip in and tap him over the head hard enough to . . .

To get his cabin floor all smeared up with blood, to have some of it seep down into the bilge where he couldn't get to it and clean it off in a hurry, where they'd find it and take it to some chemical place and analyze it and . . .

He must quit this! He must hold on to himself! He must! He must! Maybe he wasn't as strong as Hasting but he was a lot tougher. He must outlast him. He'd still be strong enough to drag him away from the door, to get the cask where he could drink from it after the soft city landsman was far gone in unconsciousness. Of course he would; of course he could. He must!

Must! It was Rose—Rose Gardiner and Gardiner's fortune. His for an hour of this—or two hours—or . . .

He couldn't stand three hours. He wouldn't stand three hours. Rose—who was she? Gardiner—his money—what were they? What was anything but water—the water in that cask behind that door?

He did not leap up and start for the cabin the first time or the second or the third that he went round the cycle of mental agony and physical torture. He was a strong man of strong will. He had the physical resistance of a seaman—that resistance which carries men of the sea through days of clinging to spars in icy waters, weeks of starvation and even thirst, hours with their clothes frozen to

their bodies and their gloves ice-bound to the spokes of their wheel, and brings them out of such hells of torture alive and ready in a few days to chance it all over again.

He must go round the ring of thought again and again. The tenseness of its most agonizing moments must grow more desperate; the strength he gathered in those when he inwardly lashed himself to quiet, must grow less strong.

Only God and Hasting knew what the other was suffering. But Hasting did not know that there was water within reach of his hand; that fact did not fling its weight upon the taut cords of will with which he struggled to keep the thought of water out of his mind. The truth was that neither of the men were in such physical need of water as would have made them seriously weak for a physical effort, had they been called upon to make one. Full half their agony was mental, and Purdue alone knew of the ten-gallon cask.

It took hours to break him. He had to realize that his chance of success with his scheme had been poor at the beginning. He had banked too heavily on luxury-begotten softness in the other. He had known that few sailors would commit suicide until thirst had brought stark, raving madness.

Then he saw that Hasting was giving up the effort to sleep. He was sitting up on the bundle the sail made. In his hand was the piece of chart he had torn off, the one he had stopped writing on. It was the first time that Purdue had thought of it since Hasting had reversed his decision to go overboard. He still had Purdue's pencil. He finally got into a position, half on his stomach, where he could write on the paper laid on the bottom-boards.

What was he writing now? Purdue's rage flared up again. He knew what Hasting would write—he'd write that he hadn't committed and wouldn't commit suicide. That would mean that he couldn't be thrown overboard the first time he fainted. It would mean that he must be kept there until he was dead. It would mean that he might come to just as Purdue started to drink.

This certificate as to the manner of his death—Purdue couldn't be satisfied with that. It might have been written from dictation. It wasn't real like what he'd been writing to Rose. It wouldn't help Purdue back to her affections to show nothing more than proof that he'd let a passenger commit suicide because he or that passenger must die. She'd wonder why, since Hasting had written at all, he hadn't written something to her.

Oh, yes, he could finish the fellow up quick enough with a sharp tool, his knife or a boat-hook, but that would leave marks. And now—now he'd have to take the body in with him.

THAT was the thought that carried his rage to the breaking point. Still he was able to plan murder with some caution, though it would be now only murder of revenge, itself extinguishing the last spark of hope of enjoying that of which he would deprive the other with his life. The short boat-hook would be the best weapon, less apt to mess up the cabin with blood beyond all hope of cleaning it up. He thought of that. He thought to ease the mainsheet well off, so that, though the boat might take the waves in heavy broadsides, the danger of capsizing would be less while he left the wheel. He thought to approach his victim stealthily, by the other side of the centerboard-trunk, with the short, clubbed boat-hook behind him.

The position in which Hasting lay afforded him more nearly than he had had before a view of both sides of that partition formed by the forward end of the trunk. He noted the sudden increase of the boat's lurch, the solid water that poured over the combing from a wave's tip, the fact that Purdue had moved again and then the silent darkening of the other side of the cabin. He half rose to see why Purdue was coming in, instinctively explaining the shutting off of the light correctly.

A second heavy lurch almost threw Purdue from his feet. It halted him enough to give the other time to get up. The hand that held the boat-hook Purdue had raised to catch at the cabin side in averting the fall. It must have been in his distorted face and lurid eyes that Hasting got the signal of real danger.

"Steady, old man," he uttered calmly. "What do you want?"

Purdue knew the other was not afraid, knew that Hasting thought him off his mind. Also, familiarity grown to instinct told him that he could not wield a club in the cabin while Hasting was standing up. Hasting's calm steadied Purdue to an effort to play his part.

"Water! Water!" he shrieked. "I want water! Get out of my way! Get out of my way!"

"But—but, Purdue—there's no water here. Listen, old man, the water's out in the jug."

Hasting moved aside as he spoke. There seemed no reason to do otherwise.

The door stood before Purdue's flaming eyes. The mere mention of water had brought his fevered thirst to torture away every other madness. He seized the folded sail and dragged it clear. With a jerk that pulled its staple from the thin boarding of the cabin's ceiling, he flung the door open. Hasting did not interfere with his hasty crawl half-way into the low opening. It did not look as if a man could hurt himself much in that narrow space.

Purdue caught at the cask. There was a spigot at one end. He tried to get at it with his mouth. He had partly succeeded when another of the boat's terrific lurches swung him so that he loosened his front teeth against the brass of the faucet. He lost patience. Grasping the little barrel with both hands, he started to worm his way back out.

In another instant he had it on the cabin floor, and Hasting became alert as he watched. He caught at the significance of what Purdue was doing—the wrong significance.

"Hey—don't drink that! Good ——, man, what is it? You'll kill yourself. It's—it's oil. It's your oil for the lamps. Purdue!"

The man felt himself snatched back from the spigot which he had got open, from which he had caught the first trickling drop. He tried to leap up. Hasting was upon him. He caught at Hasting's wrist and dug into it with his hard, rough nails. Hasting's free hand descended on the back of his head with a blow meant to stun. It took the fight out of Purdue.

"It's water! It's water!" he screamed, getting a glimpse of the stream that now trickled along a board six inches beyond hope of reaching it. "My ——! It's water and you're letting it get away. Oh! Oh!" He ended in a groan of utter agony.

Hasting, making sure of a better hold on the man under him, reached forward until he could wet his finger in the trickle on the board. He put the finger to his parched tongue.

"Great ——!" he screamed as he leaped for the spigot. "It is water!"

Maybe it was because he was afraid of the other's madness, maybe it was because he was trained that way, maybe it was from real belief that the other's thirst was greater than his own and more in need of immediate relief—at any rate, Hasting drew the keg toward Purdue.

"Here, you drink first," he invited. He sat back and watched the other drink. The relief of his mind left him giddy. The room went around him in black circles. He sat still. Vaguely he sensed that Purdue was drinking more than a very thirsty man ought to drink. He tried to warn the other. It was too great an effort. He needed his strength to reach that spigot when the other was finished.

THEN strength came from an unexpected source. The cabin seemed fairly to bellow with the roar of a foghorn. Purdue, his eyes starting from the pressure he had brought into his stomach, drew up from the spigot and leaped to the hatchway.

To Hasting nothing else in the world could matter until he had drunk. He stopped only when he felt a sharp pain in his chest from swallowing too fast. The water, having lain close to the bottom of the boat and the cold sea just outside, was surprizingly cold. To his blistered tongue it felt icy.

As he drank he was conscious of a booming voice. Vaguely he heard the words it shouted.

"For the love of cripes, Jess Purdue, what in time you doin' out here with a sail up and you in the cabin, lettin' yer ship founder in the trough like this? Are—are you plumb crazy?"

Then he looked up and saw Jess Purdue, struggling to speak, unable to do it, toppling headlong across the trunk in

the cockpit. Hasting got back enough strength to start upward as he heard a bump alongside and the thud of heavy feet on the deck. He emerged and faced his future father-in-law.

"——'s bells," greeted the old captain, "what is it anyway?"

Hasting told the amazing, impossible story of what he believed had happened to them. He had not gone far before Captain Gardiner stooped down and picked up something from the floor of the cockpit—something that looked to Hasting like a big, nickel-plated watch. He seemed about to show it to Hasting, then to think better of it.

Hasting would never know that Rose's father had limits beyond which he was unwilling to confess his failure to read a man, unwilling to let his daughter or her future husband know all the villainy he began to understand.

"Here, my lad," he suddenly offered, "have a drop of this; then see if you can get over onto the oyster boat. Rose is there—in the window. I'll stay with —him and steer this while the sloop tows her in. Steady, now!"

Harding was aboard the sloop. It had got over being a real sloop long since. A big cabin covered most of it. A heavy, noisy, clumsy but powerful engine drove it through the water. From Rose he was to learn that the two school-teachers had given an alarm which had been signaled across to Mananlico. The big converted sloop was one of a half-dozen boats that had been searching all night for the *Jessie P.*

The lovers had forsaken the warmth of the cabin and seated themselves behind it. They saw but could not hear the conversation which took place between Captain Gardiner and Purdue after the latter had been partly resuscitated by a dose from the same medicine-flask which had stopped the cramp in Hasting's stomach. They saw that Captain Gardiner held in his hand a shining, silvery thing that looked like a big watch.

"Wonder why father's giving him a compass," said Rose.

"We didn't have any aboard. That's how we got lost," Harding explained. "I can't understand, though, his not knowing he had that cask of water aboard."

"Or his being lost here—within a mile of shore," Rose mentioned. "And—he hardly needs a compass now."

But it seemed that he did need a compass. An hour after they were landed at the Mananlico dock, Purdue, with his belongings hastily packed into a small trunk, lumbered back to his boat and aboard it. He got up the reefed sail on its shortened mast. He cast off.

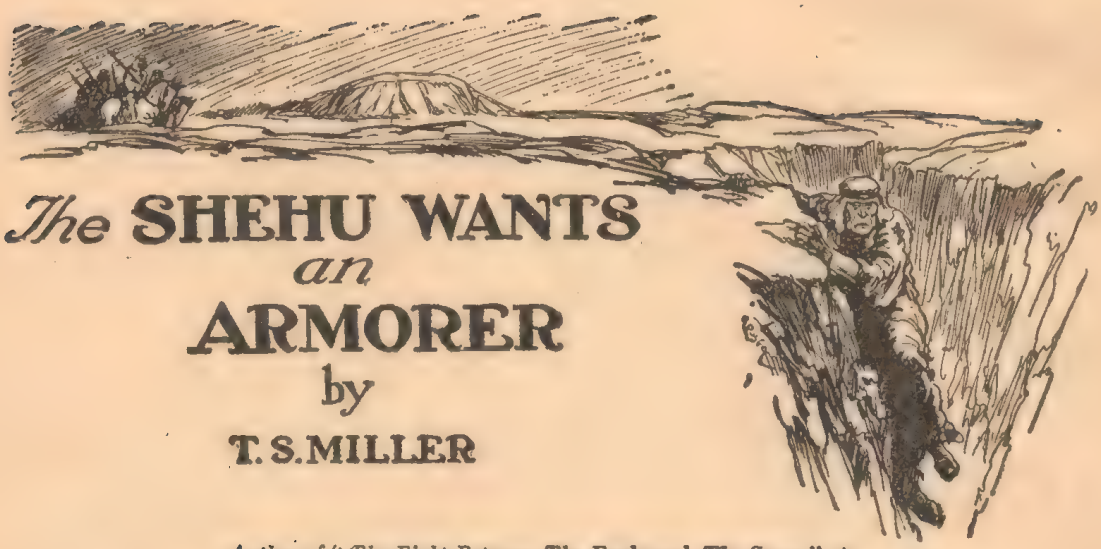
No one from the vicinity of Mananlico ever went to search for the catboat or its owner, and neither man nor boat ever came back to the island village.

DOLDRUM

By MURRAY G. BREESE

MY life is like a Summer sea,
Becalmed, becalmed,
Wherein like some old argosy
I've sunk unpsalmed.

O God, drive waves to this deep floor,
Raise me here pent,
For could I breast a storm once more
I'd die content.



The SHEHU WANTS an ARMORER

by

T. S. MILLER

Author of "The Fight Between The Eagle and The Swan," etc.

THE day came when the great central span was swung to its concrete pillars, and the Niger was bridged. The scream of pneumatic drill, the *rat-a-tat-tat* of riveters and the shriek of block and tackle died away into the brooding silence that wrapped the shimmering lagoon and palmed shore.

At five o'clock the siren over the boiler-house wailed its last "devil-scream voice." Tim Cole was the giant foreman of the tool-sharpening smithery, but foreman in name only, for it was infinitely easier to jump to the job himself than to get it into the woolly heads of the six Sierra Leonese he caressed with inoffensive oaths.

Tim let drop a sixteen-pound sledge and automatically relaxed. Usually his mind succumbed to a genial torpidity on hearing the five o'clock whistle, but not today.

Avoiding the *hy-yieing* mob that rushed to the wash-rooms, Tim took a crazy course toward the gates of the barracks-compound around a scrap-heap of hoop-iron from bolt and rivet kegs. With apparently idle playfulness he sailed a hoop through the air over the corrugated-iron stockade and followed it with three others.

Ostensibly there was no reason for his action, but Tim Cole knew full well that a certain troubadour, ancient, sun-burned to a cinder, a typical troubadour of Negro-land in big turban and voluminous burnoose, waited the other side of the stockade to grab the hoops, as he had every work-day at this time for the past week. There was no reason why Tim should not openly help himself to all the hoop-iron he wanted, only his coworkers might have become curious, and that would have entailed explanations and perhaps expose an exciting quest he had in mind and bring him into ridicule.

Like all big fellows who are fond of their own little jokes, Tim was very susceptible to jokes on himself and, being giant-framed and ham-fisted, his susceptibility was respected. None dared try to get a rise out of Tim.

Disguising his excitement by a show of purposelessness, Tim passed out of the compound into the hut-village. As he went he viewed the blacks haunched around their communal supper pots with a disgust as keen today as it had been seven months ago when he had arrived with ideas of Africans founded on howling dervishes and genuine imported savages in genuine war-dances seen at the circus side-shows.

Tim nursed an abused credulity of the torpidity and softness to which the savage succumbs under the protection of white man's laws and police. He made the mistake of thinking that village a fair example of Africa in the lump. It had been a real relief when he found in the troubadour who went by the name of Issou, a "nigger"—Issou was not a negro, but to Tim's simple ideas any black was

negroid—intelligent enough to admire white man's science and ingenuity and to wonder at the great steel bridge. Moreover, Issou had a flattering awe of Tim himself, whom he addressed as "O Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals."

The extraordinary friendship between the giant smith and the weazened troubadour was now three months old and had originally been brought about by Tim's curiosity. Tim hadn't the ghost of a suspicion that the weazened troubadour he found in the village strumming on a *gilau*—a gourd with two gut strings and dried seeds inside, which Issou rolled to imitate the patter of rain on foliage, the rustle of wind in the treetops, the sigh of the river, cries of children, or whatever the story he chanted called for—had any ulterior motive when he sought the smith's friendship by offering him a kola nut. Such an offer is the have-one-on-me of West Africa.

At first their intercourse was restricted to wild, pantomimic gestures which Tim mistook for the sign language, but later Issou took to patiently instructing Tim in the Kanuri tongue. At first Tim was merely amused, then curious, then interested and, eventually, victimized by the strange quest which Issou gradually insinuated into the smith's bottomless credulity.

"D'ye mean to say, Issou," gasped Tim, "that this *shehu* of N'dele will give me for just a couple of head-loads of old hoop-iron all the land I can encompass in walking between sunrise and sunset?"

Tim had to translate it laboriously into Kanuri and found he had not got it quite right. With the patience of an African stalking his quarry, the troubadour explained that the hoop-iron was *dash,* which is to say the customary present expected by an African chief from a visitor. Sunrise-to-sunset domain was open to any claimant.

Had Tim's brains measured up to his brawn he might have been excited to know what value there was in rusting old hoop-iron to make it worthy a *shehu's dash,* but he was just then interested in this sunrise-to-sunset domain.

"Yeh," he nodded. "In white man's country any nut can homestead a hundred and sixty acres of sage-brush that nobody else wants."

Then had Issou laid his black, cunning, inscrutable eyes on Tim and breathed a prayer.

"May Allah grant thee vision of the date oasis by the wells."

Tim got the vision all right. It seized on his mind and soul and grew and grew in magnitude and desirableness. In a word he was hypnotized—hooked hard and fast.

TONIGHT as he went through the village he felt he might be finding freedom from three meals a day and the time-clock. He dreamed of adventure through the strange tribes and countries so alluringly fabled in Issou's minstrelsy.

At the end of the hut-lane he glanced back to make sure that he was unobserved by any of his fellow workers and then gliding into the bush to Issou, who was bundling the hoop-iron into two head-loads for two blacks hired as carriers. Here Tim quickly doffed hat, coat, trousers and shoes for turban, burnoose and sandals. He wound a fold of the turban across the lower half of his face, exposing only the eyes. He must do this to filter his breathing of the harmattans' sands, said Issou.

The fold also hid effectually his white face, a very necessary disguise, if only Issou had been frank about it, for they were to cross northern Nigeria, where British residents might exhibit an uncomfortable interest in a white man traveling in company with a mendicant troubadour. Issou would then have been put on the carpet, and Tim might have learned that his African friend was the rascally recruiting agent of the *shehu* of N'dele (endeelee) and that the *shehu* was in dire need of an armorer. The resident might have laughed at the sunrise-to-sundown domain as sucker-bait and given Tim official warning. Not that that would have turned Tim back. "Sure," he would have said, "it's the *shehu's* colonizing scheme."

Tim had been disappointed in the sluggish Africans of the village; he had yearned for the Africa of the howling dervishes and genuine savages. His wish was granted with heavy-handed generosity.

Across the pagan belt he hoboed with his strange companion, hypnotized by the quest of sunrise-to-sunset domain, his simple head filled in wonder at the cannibalistic flesh-pots of the Munchi, the wild Montoil who filed down the front teeth for fashion's sake, the savage Yergum whose heads were shaved to tufty centers and who wore long grass tails and suspiciously watched the travelers to see that they did not make "bad magic" against the country.

They were mobbed, starved, bullied, made to dance to sulky-livered, nose-ringed, ebony kings, but mostly squeezed through on the prestige of Kanuri—called "big-bellied Kanuri" among the barbarians of whom Issou spoke with Mohammedan scorn as "savage bushmen."

They waded the spongy marsh-lands of Lake Chad where the shy Buduma lived in huts perched high on stilts. They traveled in the cool of late afternoon, timing their arrival at the villages so that it would be after the supper hour, when the stomachs were comfortable and the Africans kindly disposed to Issou's minstrelsy. Ever Issou sang the glories of the *shehu* of N'dele and of tribal heroes, and the adventurers lived off the food offerings that were dropped in the troubadour's calabash.

Tim lost count of the "sleeps"—days—lost touch with all the life he had known and seemed almost to lose touch with himself. If sometimes the phantom of doubt crossed his vision of sunrise-to-sunset domain, it was banished by the crowding changes, surprizes and uncertainties of the trail. There was something else, too—a real friendship that was growing up between him and the little, weazened old minstrel. Hunger, hardships and common dangers shared bridged the great chasm between the white giant and the ancient African; a partnership of strength and cunning was developed that got them through many tight places.

At times Tim caught Issou's small, black, sun-puckered eyes resting on him with an expression that he could hardly define. If Tim had entertained the idea that the agent of the *shehu* was treacherously trapping him, he would have defined Issou's expression as resulting from a prick of conscience.

Issou began to concern himself with Tim's spiritual well-being. He would drop Koran texts into the smith's open mind with the earnestness of a proselyting missionary, particularly when they left behind the naked savages and mud villages and the meandering, tortuous trails for trodden caravan-routes with hustling adobe towns and tall, stern-featured Mohammedans in turbans and burnooses. Before these Issou posed as a *madhi*—a holy man—and gave up his minstrelsy for the more profitable business of selling blessings and charms against evil magic.

They shared the same supper pot, and the two negro carriers of the hoop-iron ate after them. Trudging parched plains and thirstier desert sands, plodding, plodding, plodding, his vacant face stung by the harmattans' grit, the empty skies and wide horizons; his simple understanding of simple things swamped by the mystery of mirages and the fanaticism of the humped men throating *"Allah il Allah";* hypnotized by Issou's song of the glory and wisdom of the *shehu* and the *shehu's* welcome to men learned in the crafts, Tim sought sunrise-to-sunset domain as elemental men will follow an idea, without criticism.

His faith in Issou was not altogether naive. He felt the troubadour's friendship. No two men could have hobnobbed as they had without arriving at a deep and true understanding of the feeling between them.

Yet there was something wrong—something disturbing about that long, questioning look that Tim often felt Issou focusing upon him. As if Issou's conscience was pricking more and more, the expression became more frequent as they approached N'dele.

THE glamour of the adventure had not worn off as the smith passed through the arched gate in the clay walls of N'dele, else must he have been greatly disappointed in the *shehu* hero of Issou's Iliad. There was a little of court splendor and Solomon glory about the patriarchal man with a dyed sheepskin for a throne, a spreading baobab tree for the palace where, cross-legged and calm, he received the elaborate salutations of his recruiting agent and laid large black,

fiery eyes on the giant recruit whom Issou introduced with a mouthful of oratory as the "Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals" and one who brought the *shehu* a splendid *dash*.

Certainly a Solomon would not have taken such an immense satisfaction in two bundles of old hoop-iron as did the *shehu*. He arose with throaty gurgles of sheer delight and moved with his court, Tim trailing the troubadour owl-eyed with wonder, to a primitive open-air smithery. Tim laughed uproariously at the clay forge with human blowpipes for bellows, a stone anvil and unbalanced hammers. The smiths received the hoop-iron as if they had never dreamed of such a prodigious quantity of the precious metal. Almost unbelievable had been the story, sung in the market-place by the traveling troubadour, of the "iron road" which the whites were throwing over the Niger—the story that had fired the *shehu* and his patriotic servant Issou with visions of a greater N'dele. They imagined the soldiers of the faithful in invincible armor. The *shehu* eyed the giant smith as if he already owned him and mouthed his title with deep satisfaction.

"O Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals, what *dash* shall I give thee?"

True to his coaching by Issou and true to the latter's plot with the *shehu,* Tim asked for a try at sunrise-to-sunset domain.

Was it fancy or did a flicker of cunning satisfaction really cross the *shehu's* fathomless eyes? There was no doubt, however, about the sentiments of a group of interested swarthy ruffians.

"Oh-ho! The white man would encompass sunrise-to-sunset domain," they throated gleefully.

Tim felt he was being laughed at and he was not used to being laughed at, but his faith in Issou—the feeling of real friendship was too strong for him to suspect a trick. There was some joke abroad, a joke aimed at himself. He scowled into the black faces.

"Oh-ho!" they roared. "He is brave and strong. Grant him the ordeal, O Ali Burko, Defender of the True Faith."

Ordeal? Tim caught at the word. There was a nigger in the wood-pile, or were they trying to scare him off? He glared at Ali Burko. He had come a long way and he'd be hanged if he would be cheated of the prize.

"Yea!" bayed the *shehu.* "To the brave and the strong is sunrise-to-sunset domain. Tomorrow thou shalt essay it. May Allah be with thee," he piously chanted.

That seemed fair and square, all in line with Issou's promise. But why the outburst of derision from the ruffians standing around?

"He is strong. He will succeed where others failed."

"Oh, yes, he will succeed. He shall not meet a slave's yoke on the way."

They laughed uproariously. Tim's fists clenched. He swung on Issou, not belligerently so much as in pained wonder. He had trusted Issou as one trusts one with whom he has suffered. It was the *shehu* who explained:

"If sunset catches you on the way you shall serve me as armorer for five years."

Issou had not mentioned any penalty for failure. Tim regarded him with the hurt surprize of one who has fallen for a new rendition of a confidence trick. Issou met the look sadly. Blithely had he insinuated the vision into the white man's covetousness, blithely trapped him to N'dele for the glory of the prophet and the triumph of the faithful, but friendship had not entered into his calculations.

He had wanted the white man's magic in metals, but—he thought back to the trail; he remembered the hundred little tokens of affection, how the smith would slacken his long stride to suit his friend's, then clap him heartily on the shoulder and call him "some little buddy," which Issou understood was white man's way of saying "we're brothers." He recalled how Tim had taken him on his back to ford the creeks of the Lake Chad marshes—these and a hundred other little plays of affection. He met Tim's look sadly and spoke as far as he dared in the presence of the *shehu.*

"If the heart's desire and the eye's vision were no greater than the strength there would be no failures."

Issou was given to speaking in proverbs. Tim chewed it over and boiled it down to a friendly warning not to bite off more than he could chew—not to eye-

map a route beyond his strength. A fellow would be a fool to do that, he thought. Still he hesitated, scenting a trick. A guffaw from the Kanuri finally decided him. He was not used to being laughed at; certainly he was not going to give a bunch of blacks the hee-hawing at him.

"All right! Sundown tomorrow'll show which side the laugh is on," he snapped, but he had to translate it into Kanuri and thereby his words somewhat lost their punch.

Issou conducted him to lodgings and there tended him with the assiduous care of a trainer of a prospective champion. He rubbed his knee-joints and leg muscles in nut oil, saw to his supper and did everything possible to fit the smith for tomorrow's ordeal.

Yes, at times Issou found himself wishful of Tim's success, that is when the sentiment of friendship predominated over his fervent patriotism, which pictured N'dele rising to greatness, as had risen that place in white man's country of which Tim had told. This place Tim had called Pittsburg and there steel was poured out in molten rivers, cooled into huge sheets, cut and drilled with powerful machines as if it were paper. He swayed between the forces of patriotism and friendship. In a way Tim had become his hero, a giant in strength, magically learned in the mysteries of metals and a man without rancor. Tim's very torpor he mistook for the silence of wisdom. He did not know whether he wished Tim success or the *shehu* success in Tim's failure, so he passed the buck to Allah. Yea, *"Allah il Allah."*

THE narrow slit in the polished clay walls showed a strip of starred sky when Issou wakened Tim from the blessed sleep of children and primitive giants. He rose confident, eager, strong, imperturbable—yes, imperturbable even to the roar of mocking laughter with which a score of mounted Kanuri greeted his appearance in the street. He grinned up into their black faces, feeling that he would "show 'em." The Kanuri wheeled their prancing mounts and led the way between the clay houses. Tim, with a water gourd and a package of fat, meaty dates wrapped in plantain-leaf, followed with shambling Issou, whose shriveled eyes still bore that disturbing expression.

"Cripes, Issou, it ain't my funeral," bayed Tim, but he was too busy observing the Kanuri and too much on the lookout for tricks to render this speech into the dialect.

The Kanuri cantered out the arched gate and across an undulating plateau. One of them carried a bundle of peeled wands. Tim wondered why, but he would not question and thereby lay himself open to mocking explanation. He quite understood that they were out after his "goat." They led to an ant-hill, up which Tim sprang with elastic muscles and gazed over the plateau.

He was not going to give his scoffers the hee-haw over him by being overcautious. No, he'd show them what a white man's strength could endure. Their deep interest nettled him. He felt their black eyes watching him between the turban folds that left exposed only the bony bridges of black, aquiline noses; he imagined grins on the hidden mouths. There was something sinister, uncanny about them—about the whole proceeding. He swept their masked faces, the black, mysterious pools of their expressionless eyes, and grew fractious of their silence, their very appearance. They seemed like riders of the Ku Klux Klan gathered in the early dawn for an execution. They had some joke—some trick.

He swept again the shadowless plateau whitening in the slow-coming dawn, but could find no trick or trap in its undulations which offered no other obstruction than scattered clumps of cacti and clay-yellow gashes cut by the torrents of the rainy season. He turned and looked down at Issou, who had squatted at the foot of the ant-hill. He was ready to quarrel with his friend, though he did not really know the reason. His mood was disarmed, however, by Issou's look of—of what?—sympathy, sadness, warning—what? Bah! Now they saw that he meant business they were trying to scare him off the attempt at sunrise-to-sunset domain, he savagely told himself, not in conviction but simply because he could find no other argument.

He turned and swung his gaze out

over the plateau and eye-mapped his day's route. A gigantic lone baobab that broke the empty expanse to the south he marked for his half-way rest—his noon shade. Then he would swing in a half-circle round to the west, to a rock that rose abruptly from the plain. He made mental note that he must be careful not to be caught behind that near sundown, for then his view of the ant-hill would be blocked and his direction lost in the broken country.

He thought of Issou's warning: "If the heart's desire and the eye's vision were no greater than the strength there would be no failures." Yes, he must not bite off more than he could chew. Still, it would be his own lookout if he mapped more than he could cover. If a prideful determination to show his scoffers what a white man could stride in a day fooled him into omitting a cautionary allowance for unforeseen delays, for diminishing strength and sun-glare, it was not because Tim did not consider these things, nor because he mapped in the buoyancy of the morning's strength and optimism and allowed no margin for the high visibility of twilight. Then where was the joke?

He tried to read it in the solemn, amused eyes of the horsemen, but the only result was a fretful irritation at their appearance—mounted scarecrows in voluminous burnooses casting distorted and gigantic shadows before the saffron fires in the east that heralded the coming of the sun. He looked at the troubadour and a sudden memory flashed through his mind. He thought he had pricked the joke. Where was the date oasis by the wells of which the minstrel had sung so alluringly? He flung the question at Issou.

Issou lifted a troubled glance and replied:

"Can then the eye's vision encompass man's covetousness? Will not Allah grant thee vision of the oasis?"

He said it sadly, as one intoning a formula, as if, in fact, he had said it many, many times before to other aspirants. Hitherto he had made it a prayer that Allah grant the smith the vision of the oasis. Now he put it in the form of a question, as if he were side-tracking responsibility. Whatever his aim, the Kanuri took up his reply with echoing laughter.

"Oh, Allah will grant the white man vision of the date oasis," they guffawed, rocking in their saddles with mirth, but as Tim's fingers twitched convulsively at imaginary black throats their laughter suddenly ceased and they flung out of saddles in prayerful attitude to the ball of fire that was rising over the far rim of the world.

IT was the signal for the day's race. Tim waited the full rounding of the orb, then leaped down the ant-hill and swung off in a loose-jointed, free, steady gait to throated "*Allah il Allah!*"

A while he walked along, the soft pad of shoeless horses trailing him. He gave one glance behind; saw Issou seated on the ant-hill, resolved to sit there all day and wait the outcome, no doubt; swept the mocking eyes of the Kanuri and then resolved to shut them out of his mind, to spare all emotion and turn himself into a walking-machine. The resolution would not hold; in spite of his will he found himself wishing he had them alone, one at a time, with nothing between their jaws and his fists but what defense they could put up with unscientific boxing hands.

He marched doggedly. The sun contracted to dinner-plate size, slowly crawling up an empty sky. He began to think too much about the sun, to dream of cloud-veiled skies.

The rain gulleys proved deeper and wider than had appeared from the ant-hill. The smith could not always jump them, but had to slide down crumbly clay, often a hundred feet or more, then laboriously struggle up the other side, up loose, caking clay that offered neither foothold nor finger-clutch. He tried climbing crabwise, leaning his weight to the bluff, grabbing at thorny cacti which tore his hands and pulled away under his weight, tumbling him in giddy spins to the bottom. The derisive laughter of the Kanuri who took the gaps in easy leaps and waited above him, comfortable in their high-pommeled saddles, maddened him as they called down teasing proverbs.

"A man there was who asked Allah for the world. Allah gave him his covet-

ous wish. He stretched his arms to grasp his prize and burst asunder."

The smith wasted his strength in fretting and irritation; he began to fear and hate the gulleys as much for the derision they cost him as for the labor and delay, yet he doggedly kept his set pace through the first half of the swing toward the baobab tree, not so far behind schedule as to take thought and caution when the Kanuri pointed out enticing pasture at the bottom of a long dip in the plateau.

"O Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals, what is domain without pasture that feedeth the ox and the sheep? Can man live by earth alone?" they tauntingly tempted.

The teasing finally stung him so that he deviated from his course to include the pasture. There he discovered the use of the peeled wands, for the Kanuri with the bundle planted a wand at his outermost boundary. There were other wands planted there, too, a score, perhaps—tombstones of failures gone before.

The wand was planted to uproarious laughter. They had a great joke on the white man, if only he knew it. They laughed in their hollow throats, in their deep abdomens. The smith tried to close his ears to it and close his mind to the doubts and phantoms conjured up by those failures gone before.

"They bit off more'n they could chew, and it's me as have to thank 'em for leaving the chance to me," he told himself, yet he could not stop worrying about those failures.

He took the long up-hill climb to the plateau, fretting while the ant-hill was lost to view, for he wanted the goal always comfortably in sight. Again and again it was lost behind the undulations. Then he could only estimate his position.

Another discovery began to worry him. The baobab that had stood out so clear in the dawn now seemed to have grown strangely remote. It looked like a column of smoke suspended over a bush fire. The land seemed to have undergone a sinister transformation. He could not understand the change between the clearness of dawn and the blur of the heat haze. It worried him and he was not used to worry.

"There's some trick; there's some trick," he kept reiterating with pathetic insistence.

The earth burned through his sandals. The heat and the sun-glare began to bother him. His turban afforded his eyes no protection. Then the harmattan, as regular in these lands as noon itself, blew its stifling breaths and swung fine sands into his inflamed eyes. The grit worked under his swollen lids, cutting like sharp-edged flints against the tortured balls, and the wind flapped and entangled his loose burnoose about his legs.

He seemed to make no progress toward the baobab. He should now be resting in its shade, according to his mapped schedule. He wanted to lop off his circuit, but it was becoming an obsession with him to swing out the full route and turn the laugh on his tormentors, whose guttural whisperings, permeating the soft pounding of the hoofs, nettled him to imagining jibes and jeers. He hated their cool comfort in their deep-seated saddles, their black feet planted comfortably in wide, wooden stirrups, the harmattan ballooning their burnooses. To his salt-sweated, rage-filled vision, they seemed inhuman, billowy grotesques—just black eyes, black hands, black feet stuck on swollen bags—Frankenstein monsters out to make a sport of him.

Wetting his lips and parched throat at the water gourd, he trudged on toward the deceptive baobab now clearly defined in trunk, branch, twig, now lost in a swirl of sand. The sun crossed the meridian. Still he dogged on.

Suddenly the tree appeared directly before him. He gravitated toward it and tumbled to a heap in its friendly shade.

The Kanuri unhorsed and squatted around him like penguins, calmly inquisitive of the distressed shipwrecked stranger thrown up on their desolate shores—penguins with hateful proverbs.

"*Gedi kanadiben tsaknawa*"—At the bottom of patience there is heaven—scoffed one, and another capped it jocularly—

"*Tama sugo diniabe*"—Hope is the pillar of the world.

They planted a wand in the graveyard of wands by the baobab—planted it to loud, explosive laughter.

HE had to cut down his long noon rest in the shade of the baobab to a short hour. It took great effort of will to rise to his protesting legs, to force his eyes into the tortuous glare and plunge into the heat waves that danced on the plateau as on a hot stove. He hesitated a moment, of a mind to throw up the sponge and bee-line for the ant-hill, but he caught the upturned faces of the men on the ground and saw them reading his hesitation, ready to burst into guffaws.

Grinding his teeth he swung out for the lone rock. The Kanuri did not immediately follow, but took their deliberate comfort in the shade. After a while, however, the staccato of the hoof-beats came up behind, beating on his irritation like a physical pain. He dogged on, his body flung forward at an angle that carried him along by gravitation, his sweat-soaked turban a dead weight.

Hours were months, the sun's slow decline to the west a century. His seared eyeballs stared into the haze at the lone mount; he wanted it in view all the time to help him keep a true estimate of the position of the ant-hill and gage his chances against the sun's decline. The land grew broken and boulder-strewn, the result of the earth convulsions that had squeezed out the mountain. He had to keep a lookout for the boulders. His chin sunk on his chest.

Suddenly the following hoof-beats were punctuated by drawn-out "A-ah's!" of discovery. He lifted his head and looked back at his tormentors. They were pointing lean, long black forefingers to the left. He was amazed to see palms or, rather, amazed to think he had nearly missed the date oasis. The sun-glare must have affected his sight.

That was the great joke; one could easily miss the jewel of the domain. Yes, that was the explanation of Issou's mysterious prayer that Allah grant him vision of the oasis. But why had the Kanuri drawn his attention to it? —— them! They were daring him; they saw he would be taking a great risk by swerving out to include the oasis. They were daring him, mocking him. He could never make it. They saw that and were giving him a teasing vision of the very desirable oasis. Desirable—! His lips already felt the cooling water of the wells; it trickled down his gritted throat; he lapped his hot face in it, bathed his inflamed eyes.

He stopped and fed his soul on the sight—the palm fronds patterned against the horizon, mystical, magical, wonderful—dates, the bread of the Sudan. Date palms and wells! What kind of laugh would he have on his tormentors if he failed to hog the oasis? Yet——

He looked at the mount, estimated the ant-hill and the sun's decline. A hand's breadth above the jagged sky-line the sun waited—seemed to wait. The palms looked less than a mile away.

A Kanuri teased his indecision.

"O Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals, what is domain with the date palms, without the wells?"

What indeed? In Issou's minstrelsy the *shehu's* greatness was glorified by the number of his wells.

The figures in the saddles looked down on him curiously. A mouth uttered a guttural taunt through its muffling fold—

"A dog has four legs, yet it can not walk two paths."

He with the peeled wands cackled—

"I will plant a wand for the white man by the oasis."

The ruffians rocked in their saddles in rib-breaking merriment. Such a joke they had on him, —— them! He'd show them!

A stupid fury swept him. He would show them what a white man's strength and will and endurance is. He laughs best who laughs last——

He plunged toward the silhouetted palms, breaking into a Chinese peddler's lolloping run-walk, his leg muscles protesting.

Suddenly he halted on the brink of quite a precipice. He swayed there a moment in dull surprize, then started to clamber down. He lost foot-hold, whirled, clutched, rolled to the bottom, picked himself up and teetered on toward the oasis, without thought of the awful climb he would be forced to make on his return. He was not doing any thinking. Rage and grim determination to put it over his scoffers shut out thought. He blundered on for a short while, relieved of the Kanuri, who rode off to find a descent for their mounts.

It was not long, however, before the torturing beat of the hoofs in an easy canter again teased his distress.

The way was boulder-strewn. He kept stubbing his toes and stumbling, but that worried him less than the strange behavior of the oasis, which one moment was alluringly near, almost before him, but then faded into the misty horizon, now gone altogether. He remembered the similar behavior of the baobab in the morning, so he forged steadily on.

He knew nothing of mirages, had forgotten in long years of smithing what the Fourth Reader had said, so he had no saving suspicion of the trick. He did not know that the spectral imagery of the western Sudan is curiously repetitional in hour, place and tableau and that the palm vision was part of the cunning plot that put slaves' yokes around the necks of aspirants to sunrise-to-sunset domain.

His mind had been prepared to expect an oasis and he had seen one. Anyway, he was too rattled at the taunts of the Kanuri and too set upon his determination to include the oasis and turn the laugh on them, to nurse any doubts. One after another the taunting proverbs were bayed down from the horsemen.

"Wisdom is not in the eye but in the head. A load on another's back is easily carried. What Allah hath decreed, that shall he see."

They roared with glee to see the white man sweating heart and blood and soul in following a delusion, his covetousness leading his neck into a slave's yoke. How they roared when he stubbed his toe and fell flat on his face.

"He prays to Allah. Nay, 'tis not yet the hour of prayer. He need pray to Allah."

He choked the curses on his lips and stumbled on.

HE began to worry. The sun had gone behind the mount. A giant shadow stole over the land, chilling, ominous. He could not see the oasis at all. He stopped and shaded his aching eyes with his hand. The palms had disappeared.

There was some trick. It was enchantment. He recalled the strange things he had witnessed in crossing the pagan belt—witchcraft, sorcery, obsession, atavism. Had not Issou peddled charms against evil magic, exorcised wicked devils? Issou had bewitched him. That was the joke. There was no oasis; it was all in his own brain—a vision planted there by the —— minstrel.

No one had ever dared to play a practical joke on him. His brawn and ham fists had seen to that. It was a new experience and it hit him hard. He turned on his scoffers, but rage quickly subsided into cold fear of the mountain's shadow, the sun's obscurity, the remoteness and invisibility of the ant-hill, the escarpment he had to climb. He looked up into the solemn, amused black eyes, not in rage nor in entreaty, but with a piteous helplessness. After a few long moments he started to retrace his steps.

Yards seemed miles; little obstacles grew into tremendous obstructions; boulders, easily stepped over in the freshness of his morning's strength, he now had to go around.

He reached the base of the bluff and flung himself at it, in his flurry not pausing to scan it quietly for an easy place to climb. He panted up, clawing and toeing crevice and fissure, to a narrow ledge, where he stalled, unable to mount higher. His ascent was greeted with guttural derision.

"He coveted sunrise-to-sunset domain and Allah hath given him a slave's yoke. Ho, ho! Our *shehu* will have an armorer, yea, a Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals will he have for armorer. He shall labor five years for his folly; he will make us guns like the white man hath."

He turned on them raging, his morale broken. He tried to curse them but his swollen tongue uttered no sound. A slave's yoke! He, Tim Cole, white man, would be a slave to a nigger. The horror steadied him. He shut his teeth, stood off from the bluff and searched its face, traced an upward passage and went at it with cold, grim determination. Awhile the Kanuri watched his efforts, saw he would make it, then cantered off to the place they had descended before.

He worked up what geologists call a chimney, the sweat and dust in his eyes, his loose burnoose catching and tearing. Spitting dust, gasping breaths, snorting,

his burnoose now fluttering in rag strips, he at last topped the plateau. Already his scoffers were there to mock his labors from their comfortable saddles. They had bared their faces, for the harmattan had died down with the declining sun and the need to filter their breathing was removed. They opened black, cavernous mouths showing gleaming white teeth and then burst forth into rock-roaring hilarity.

Tearing his sweat-soaked turban from his matted head and casting it away, the smith teetered ahead like an automaton whose clock-work was running down. His legs pulled after him as if they lifted the whole world; his sandals cloyed the earth; the calves of his legs knotted painfully; his muscles seemed to have no resilience; from thighs to knees, flesh and sinew were stiff as boards.

The mount obscured the position of the sun which his fearful imagination placed on the rim of the world. He tried to hurry—to get out of the shadow, but when he had done that, he was sorry, for he got the full glare of the sun. In his morning's calculation he had aimed to have the sun-glare at his back on the last lap, but the swerve after the mirage and the bluff had confused his direction.

The sun rolled low in the horizon, its slanting rays poured full into his tortured, burning eyeballs as he panted up a slight incline toward the ant-hill. In his distress it seemed a steep mountainside. He looked directly into the monstrous, swollen red disk of the sun, molten in the saffron fires of its play of colors on suspended dust clouds. His eyes seemed to tunnel into an inferno.

He swayed drunkenly toward the ant-hill etched against the fires, toward the quiet figure of the troubadour, seated as he had been in the morning which now seemed a hundred years ago. It was Issou, his friend, companion of the trails and hardships—ah, yes, but the companion who had beguiled him, tricked, cheated, trapped him. He could not understand that. He had trusted in Issou. He was hurt inside—hurt in his heart somehow, someway, he didn't just know. He was now so beset with physical pain, tiredness and the struggle that he could not think. The inferno beyond seemed to confuse him. He struggled on.

Now there were but two hundred yards between him and the goal. Likewise there were but a few inches between the rim of the world and the lower edge of the sun. Then, too, between him and the hill was a gash of yellow clay—a rain gulley. He could not see very well because of the weird images, the bright colors and grotesques of the retina—colors and grotesques that swam into his brain. He stumbled, caught himself, dragged on. Out of the air fell the staccato of hoof-beats and the guttural-throated proverb.

"*Kabu datsia, kargum bago*"—The day being finished, there is no medicine.

They filled his nightmare world with thunderous laughter. He hadn't the energy to curse. The color grotesques filled his brain bwilderingly. It was a nightmare—the mounted tormentors hell-shapes, Frankenstein monsters. Nightmare paralysis held his legs; they refused to obey his will; only by prodigious effort could he budge them a few inches; the ant-hill was there, so near, but heart and blood and will and muscle could not bring him to it.

He stood on the brink of the rain gulley. The Kanuri guffawed.

"Ho, ho! Our *shehu* will have a strong armorer."

His heart went dead within him. It was not a wide gulley, it had seemed nothing when he noted it in his morning's buoyancy, but now it was as unachievable to his dead legs as the Grand Cañon of Colorado.

He stared stupidly down at it, down fifty feet of crumbly clay; then he lifted his eyes to the sun, to the half-sun sitting on the rim of the world. He swayed there, a pathetic picture of utter helplessness, while the Kanuri rode round and round in cantering circles, taking the gulley in easy, teasing leaps, riding tail to tail, their flapping burnooses fanning his hot face, their black faces taunting.

"O Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals, why do you wait? Look! The sun goes. Why do you wait? But a little way and the domain is thine."

He felt their burnooses in his face.

SUDDENLY a desperate, half-crazed hope came to him. He flung both hands to a flying stirrup. His arms

seemed to be jerked from their sockets, his body to weigh a ton on the awful pull. Then his feet dragged the earth, but on the ant-hill side of the gap. The frightened horse plunged and dragged him within a few feet of the hill; then his hands let go and his knee-caps and forehead came into violent concussion with the earth.

The color grotesques burned in his brain. He lay there stupefied. Presently he raised up on his stinging elbows, then on his palms, and thus hung, staring dully at the ant-hill, so near, if only he could make the effort; but the will to strive was with him no more. He felt the chilling breaths of sundown. He stared vacantly at the hill, trying to grasp its significance.

Slowly into his confusion dawned the figure seated there—the little old troubadour, his friend of the trails, the friend who had betrayed him. That betrayal stood out bigger than anything else; it dimmed the failure to achieve the domain, to put the laugh on his scoffers, to escape the slave's yoke—dimmed them into a kind of torpid fatalism. His friend had betrayed him. He could not understand it and, propped there on his hands, he asked of the cunning, sun-puckered eyes a dumb, pathetic question.

Issou rose. The cunning died out of his old eyes which seemed to shrink behind their wrinkled lids and cower from the gaze of the stricken giant. All the long day he had been beset by the rival forces of friendship and patriotism.

In the beginning, back there in the village by the bridge, it had been glorious plotting to lure the White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals to N'dele and thus secure to the *shehu* and the Kanuri the wonderful smithery of the whites. He had not foreseen friendship with the victim, that big simplicity and trust of the smith's that had lodged him in Issou's heart.

All day he had swung between patriotism and friendship and then had seen Tim stagger out of the heat, the dust, the glare, dragging his legs after him, sun-blinded, derided by the Kanuri, the pathetic victim of his own credulity and cupidity—and of Issou's treachery. It had not seemed treachery when he had plotted it, but the white man had been as a child in his trust—a son in his care of Issou. Issou was very, very old. There were few live coals left in his cindered passions—little left but the steady fire of patriotism for the greatness of N'dele and the triumph of the faithful.

Since the Pagan Belt, however, the white man had been a son to him, his young strength the old man's staff. Issou's heart was sorely troubled. He had not thought much about the slave's yoke when plotting the trick. Domestic slavery in the Sudan is lenient—slavery in name only, and often the first rung in the ladder to emirships and *shehuships*.

He had seen something of the smith's pride, however, as he watched the giant stagger to the edge of the gulley, had seen and sorrowed for the smith's agony of helplessness there and then—how his heart had leaped within him—Tim's desperate crossing. Now his friend hung there on his knees and hands, looking at him, not in censure, but in pained bewilderment at his abuse of their friendship.

Issou trembled in his burnoose. He moved his eyes to the sun, a quarter-sphere on the horizon, then his gaze was drawn back to the smith and held there. A few more minutes and the *shehu* would have a White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals for armorer, to the glory of the Kanuri and the greatness of N'dele. It was the big dream realized, yet— The giant hung there piteous in his helplessness, pathetic in his feeling of abused trust. Issou trembled. He was old, very old, and decision was hard to reach.

Then suddenly the miracle happened and friendship won. He stepped toward Tim, grasped his two hands from the earth and pulled him to the hill. The sun sank its upper thin rim of gold over the edge of the world.

The Kanuri planted a peeled wand on the hill, the only wand there, and then rode solemnly off to N'dele, their black heads together, for Issou was *madhi*—a holy man and wise—so they knew not what to make of his cheating the *shehu* of his armorer.

ISSOU bathed the smith's face, washed out the grit from his eyes, rubbed his aching limbs, then piled brush and bedded

him, as they had bedded often on the trail. This time Issou set a watch over his friend, who sank into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion.

Sad vigil Issou kept. It was not the *shehu's* rage he feared; he could escape that.

His own words revealed his heaviness as he told the story to Tim when the latter's eyes fluttered open on that haunting look of pained incredulity and abused trust. This look, however, passed into wonder as memory dawned and he recalled Issou stepping from the hill to aid him.

"O Strong White Man Learned in the Magic of Metals," cadenced the troubadour, "I bow my turban before thee; I put dust on my head, for I wronged thee."

"You played a —— of a joke on me, Issou," interjected Tim, falling into English.

Seeing no response in the crinkled old eyes above him, he turned to the dialect.

"You tried to put a slave's yoke on me; you tricked me into chasing images."

Issou bowed his head in remorse. Then, presently, he began to tell of the great dream he had sacrificed, how when he had seen the "iron road" over the Niger and witnessed the wonder of the white man's work in metals, he had thought to lure a white metal-worker to N'dele to teach the smiths there the mysteries. Thus would the Kanuri come to greatness and N'dele become—

"The Pittsburg of Negroland," said Tim, but Issou did not understand.

He talked on, expounding his patriotic dream, and Tim, looking up into the wrinkled face, listening to the story of Issou's struggle between patriotism and friendship and his final surrender to the latter, swallowed in his throat.

It was all a pipe dream—a "funny little guy's bug stuff." He couldn't quite catch the thing and found himself struggling with a sentiment bigger than words. He reached out and grasped Issou's small, bony, black hand and crushed it, trying to soften the sacrifice, lessen the disappointment.

"My ——, Issou," he gulped, tricked by his emotion into his mother tongue, "if you had said you wanted me to teach your smiths a thing or two I'd been willing. Cripes! I'm open to dicker with your *shehu*. There's a heap of scrap-iron down by the Niger going for the asking that would be a fortune up here. Maybe we could arrange carriers and——"

He pulled up, seeing Issou's blank look, and had to say it all over laboriously in Kanuri. He made himself understood, however, for the old eyes above him began to shine again, and when Tim had finished Issou promised him wealth and honors—yea, the *shehu* should swear it on the Koran.

A Complete Novel by GEORGE BRYDGES RODNEY

The SEVEN CITIES of CIBOLA—

Author of "The Lurking Poison," "The Firebug," etc.

AT the crash of the halberds falling in salute at the door of the great banquet-hall, the governor paused. Behind him was grouped all the chivalry and beauty that the governor's court could show in the Spanish town of Culiacan in the year of grace 1540. Very pleasantly the town stood between the mountains and the sea that washed the western coast of Mexico in the province of Sinola.

As the court party jostled at the gate, waiting the lowering of the halberds, a naked Indian runner thrust his way through the crowd. They would have resented his impertinence in crowding them, but he gave them no time. Slipping between legs and sword-sheaths, he squatted on the ground before the great governor, who stood with his hand on the shoulder of Don Francisco de Coronado.

The governor turned and the man, placing his right hand first on the earth and then to his lips, gave the sign of fealty, at the same time thrusting forward a slip of soiled parchment. An obsequious courtier seized a torch from a sconce by the door and held it while the governor read. Presently he looked up and asked a question.

The man fawned a little and shook his head. Again the governor spoke. For answer the man opened his mouth and pointed to the tongueless cavity. Coronado swore.

"What devil's work is this? What says he?"

"He can not speak at all. He failed last year to pay his taxes and cursed the king. The fiscal had his tongue torn from his jaws in punishment. I was away at the time. He brings me a message that concerns you, my friend. Listen!"

He read:

"'I have seen the earth and the fullness thereof. The cities of the earth are mine and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills. Let the start be made.'

"There, my friend, I think that will satisfy you after all your months of worry. Tonight's banquet will serve a double purpose. Gentlemen"—he faced the crowd—"Fray Marco of Nice sends me word that he has found the Seven Cities of Cibola that he sought. Don Francisco de Coronado will start upon his quest."

A hum of approval rose from the crowd and men, throwing Spanish formality to the winds, crowded about the great *conquistador* as he stood in the moment of his triumph, hands on hips, a proud smile on his lips, for his great mission was now assured.

"The Cities of Cibola can wait but not the governor's banquet. Open the doors there! Candles for the ladies! Now, gentlemen!" And the glittering throng swept into the long hall.

Great candles of yellow wax blazed in the sconces along the walls, guttering in the cold March wind. Their light was thrown back from glittering coats-of-mail, from gold and silver wine-cups that had served a Montezuma, from jeweled hilts and tempered blades, for the best swords in all New Spain had gathered at Culiacan for the great venture and had been bidden by Mendoza to the banquet.

The year before, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, riding in in state from Mexico, had presented to Governor Mendoza certain letters from the king. Letters in which his Majesty was graciously pleased to permit him, Coronado, to discover and to conquer for Spain the Seven Cities of Cibola that all men knew must lie in that strange wonderland far to the north of the red and purple ranges that blocked the far horizon.

Coronada would pay all expenses, the profits would be shared by the king. Even then, with true Spanish caution, the expedition was not to start until it was certain that the cities actually existed. Two men were at hand,—Estevanico, a giant negro who had shared with Cabeza de Vaca his ten years' wandering from Tampa to Tampico; and Fray Marco of Nice, the friar who, more than all others, flamed with a holy zeal to christianize the savage peoples of that vast new land.

With twenty-nine men, these two had gone to scout the land for news of Cibola, to verify the reports brought in by the Indians of great deposits of gold in the wonderful Siboyla far to the north. And now, as by a miracle, word had come from Fray Marco that he had found the cities and that the expedition could start.

What were the Seven Cities of Cibola? What matters it now? They were but one of the many lures that drew Spanish valor to the West in the search for empire. The tales of Mexico, of Peru, of El Dorado, had been proven true. What wonder then that men should believe the lesser tale of Cibola? Why not believe that a great empire lay to the north, when empires had already been conquered to the south and west?

The church itself taught that in the year 740 seven bishops, driven out of Spain by the Moors, had taken ship with their flocks and fled beyond the Western Ocean and had founded the Seven Cities of Cibola. No man could say where they were, but two other empires had been found—Why not Cibola?

So when Indians, coming in yearly with their tribute of gold, said that their gold came from Siboyla, was there room for doubt? Was not Siboyla of the Indian the Cibola of the ancient church? And now Fray Marco was coming back with word that he had found them.

As the halberds rose again, Mendoza laid his hand on Coronado's arm.

"It is a good omen to have a good word from a priest."

"It is very religious and scriptural no doubt, but a word as to water and grass upon the route would have been more practical."

To right and left the guests spread out, a great fan of color in which gold and silver, rubies from Taxico and emeralds from the far north, flashed and glittered as the guests seated themselves about the tables.

Mendoza raised a filled wine-cup and a cavalier rapped on the table with a sword-hilt for silence.

"There is now a double reason, my friends, for this banquet to which I have asked you——"

"A double reason?" Coronado looked puzzled. "What then?"

"In part to welcome you and your men —Is not there a vacant place? Did you not tell me that your count is complete and that all your men would be here? How many swords go with you?"

"Three hundred Spanish swords."

"Then all the places should be filled. I see you lack a man."

"My scout-master. I fear I must go without him. I sought one particular man to fill the place—the man of all Spaniards the best fitted, a scholar, a *caballero* of blood, a hardy man of war and, I hold, the best and surest sword in all the ports."

"Who is this veritable *Gonsalvo de Cordoba* whom you lack?"

"Who? Who but Andres de Avilez?

The youngest of the *conquistadores* who was with Cortez. It was he who, when Cortez ran out of powder, was lowered with ropes into the flaming crater of the great volcano Popocatepetl to get the sulfur without which our guns would have been silent forever—"

"By all the saints——!"

"It was Avilez who was with Alvarado in Honduras. If there has been a brave venture for ten years and he not in it, I for one do not know what it was."

"Where have you sought him?"

"In all the ports along the Gold Coast. What the——?"

THE halberds at the door clattered on the stone-flagged corridor. The doors clanged open and a man came in, striding freely up the long hall, picking his way among the banqueters. For a moment Coronado stood staring; then with a shout that rang along the timbered roof, he sprang forward, his eyes gleaming.

"Andres! Andres de Avilez! The man of all men whom I have sought! Welcome, man! Thrice welcome!" He pushed a filled wine-cup ready to his hand. "Drink."

Avilez raised the cup, touched with it lips and breast and with—"A health to you, brave *señor,* and to all gallant adventurers"—drained it to the bottom.

Coronado pushed him into the vacant chair and turned to Mendoza.

"See, your Excellency; the vacant place is filled. My count is complete. Where did you come from, lad? Did you get my letters?"

"Never a letter, *señor.* I heard in Vera Cruz that you were to take the field. I knew of old that there would be shrewd blows and red gold. So I came."

"But how?"

"By horse to Mexico City. Thence on foot to Durango, herding my men along at the sword's point till they ran off and left me. Then I gambled with a *caballero* for a horse and on it came to Culiacan and—here I am."

"And as welcome as a drink of water to a soul in purgatory. Eat, lad! We will talk later."

The guests, standing from respect to the governor, sank into their seats, and the soft-footed Indian servants overran the place in their eagerness to serve quickly their Spanish masters.

Great haunches of venison were there, with wild ducks in dozens, spitted on long iron rods; delicate fish from the sea and smoking rounds of beef and mutton with *camotes* baked and roasted and delicate *tortillas* made from the finest maize flour. Sweets of all kinds filled the beautiful earthenware cups and wine was there in plenty. *Chocolatl* too, that the Spaniards had learned from the conquered natives to love and, best of all to those thirsty souls, great jars of *toquila,* the fiery native brandy, and skins of fresh-made *pulque* that hung on the walls.

Followed a clash and clatter as the guests fell to. For a while Mendoza watched them, playing with his wine-cup, from time to time responding to a toast.

"Good men all," he whispered to Coronado. "An excellent gathering. I am glad to have seen them. Now"—he turned to a waiting servant—"have all the wine-cups filled. Now comes the real reason for the banquet."

He nodded his head toward a seat on his left into which a girl had swept with all the grace and dignity known only to Spanish women. Tall she was and very graceful, in spite of the ugly, tight bodice and long sleeves ordained by Spanish custom. A great rope of pearls accentuated the creamy whiteness of her throat. Lips as red as a new wound disclosed perfect teeth that slightly pressed her lower lip. Above them the eyes blazed like turquoises under a great coil of golden hair—for the girl was of the highest type of Spanish beauty—that was held in place by a delicate dagger no longer than a man's hand. Its hilt was curiously wrought of yellow tortoise-shell and twisted gold.

"My ward. The daughter of my old comrade-in-arms, Pedro de Acasta. You remember him?"

Coronado shook his head.

"She has been a great trial to me. I am too old a man, *mi compañero,* to be oppressed with the guardianship of youth and beauty. When I spoke to her of marriage she would have none of it."

"I warrant a hundred Spanish cava-

liers would willingly relieve you of your responsibility."

"No doubt. The difficulty is to get her to choose one. Since she has refused to select a husband, I have chosen one for her and, as her guardian, I have given this banquet to announce it. I warrant a scene presently when she learns that she is to marry——"

He stopped and toyed with his dagger.

"Who?"

"The king's fiscal, Don Onontio de Fonseca."

"Fonseca? A proper man to trust either with the king's taxes or a maid's life."

Mendoza's eyes followed Coronado's scornful gaze.

The Señor Onontio de Fonseca, unworthy nephew of the great bishop who had believed in Magellan, who had helped Balboa, who had dictated the policy of the India House of Seville, sat slouched in his chair like a none-too-wise owl. His gray beard was disheveled, his ruff awry.

He rolled heavily in his chair from time to time as he played with his wine-cup. Plainly the man was drunk, a rare enough vice among the abstemious Spaniards. Bestiality showed in every line of the heavy face; vice and groundless pride in his every movement.

The girl sitting next to him eyed him with disfavor. His every lurch toward her made her draw farther away in deep disdain. Plainly he was no favorite of hers.

A servant bent over the governor and a whispered word passed. His excellency rose presently and with a sweeping gesture bade all men stand. The great men hove themselves up with a clatter of arms and stood with filled cups poised.

"A toast, gentlemen and soldiers all! Such a toast as you may never drink again! I bid you drink the health of the lovely Señorita Mercedes de Acasta, the bride-to-be of Don Onontio de Fonseca——"

For a moment a hush fell over the hall. Men saw the girl spring to her feet, her wine-cup, brushed from the table by her sleeve, falling unheeded to the floor.

"It is false," she cried. "I, Mercedes de Acasta, say it is false. It shall not be. It is false, I say——"

Men who were about to drink the toast, paused and looked askance at the hulking figure in the chair next hers, where the King's fiscal leered openly at her as he sat.

Mendoza swept on unheeding.

"By this betrothal, which I now formally announce, two great houses of Old Spain will be united——"

"Your Excellency," she cried pitifully, "am I not to be heard?"

"Two large estates joined and a beautiful and pious lady is taken in marriage by a brave and worthy cavalier——"

Mercedes stood erect, every line of her tense figure silhouetted against the smoky haze of the guttering candles. And still men stood; they felt that there was more to come.

"The betrothal made this night will be consummated at Easter, when——"

A coarse wine-roughened voice broke in upon Mendoza's words.

"And I bid you all as guests to the wedding. Is it not so, *carissima?*"

Fonseca leaned forward and touched the girl familiarly upon the arm.

"Ask them yourself if you prefer," he said.

"If I prefer?" The girl fairly blazed forth. "Your Excellency! Surely you are jesting. You can not mean that you will enforce your right to make my marriage; that I am to be given away as one would give a horse or a dog. Was it for this that my father, your old comrade-in-arms, made you my guardian? I tell you, *señor,* governor or no governor, it shall not be."

Mendoza smiled a little as he stood, leaning on his hands, his knuckles whitening beneath his weight.

"How will you prevent it?" he asked presently. "My word is law here."

"But not my law," she flashed forth. "There is an appeal to the king that they dare not refuse. My family has the right of royal appeal. Until then, I have the means to prevent it."

She raised her hands to her beautiful hair, in which the curiously wrought dagger of steel and gold and tortoise-shell shone and twinkled venomously.

"Your Excellency, you have promised that which you can not fulfil."

She turned and with a quick gesture of anger left the room. As she turned, a faint metallic tinkle struck Andres' ear and he thrust out his hand to pick up the little dagger from the floor.

"A pretty toy enough," he remarked to Coronado, turning the blade over in his hand. "I have seen a smaller blade than this do good service. I will send it to the lady."

Followed a silence.

"Can you imagine Fonseca desiring to marry such a wife?"

"Eh? Why, *mi amigo,* the girl is in the right. She should not be forced."

"Then of course I am in the wrong." Mendoza's voice was cold with disfavor.

"Of course you are wrong. What is it now?" For the halberds, for the third time that eventful night, had lowered noisily as a voice instinct with emotion called out—

"Open, in the king's name!"

THE doors flung open and a man staggered rather than walked into the room. He was dressed in a torn and dirty brown cassock, the frayed edges of which showed his feet. One foot was shod with a rawhide sandal; the other was bare and left traces of blood on the lime-washed floor as he came up the long room. In his hand he bore a long staff of thorny ocatilla wood with a small white cross atop and his eyes danced with a curious consuming fire.

"Fray Marco himself." Mendoza flung himself forward over the table-edge. "Come up, man! Come up above the salt!"

"Nay, your Excellency! I have come to you with a tale to tell, for I come as one from the dead and I have seen——"

"Wine here, men! Bring wine for the good fray."

He frowned them back with an impatient gesture.

"No wine touches my lips, Señor Governor, till I consecrate it in Cibola."

"Cibola? Cibola?" The word passed along the tables and the eager adventurers crowded forward to the foot of the dais. "Have you seen it? Where is it, father? How far?"

"Where the good knight Don Francisco will lead you, I doubt not. I tell you I have seen the wonders of the world. Their houses are covered with sheeted silver and the sheen of their paved streets is as solid gold and copper. Their rivers are as full of gold-dust as our corn-bins are full of dust, and they have emeralds and rubies like grain in a wheat rick. All this I saw but—" His voice fell as he crossed himself devoutly. "Never a sign of the faith that we were looking for! I never saw a sign of the cross till they cut it on the body of Estevanico when they killed him."

"How? When?"

"They crucified him over an ant-hill, *señores,* having first cut off his eyelids."

"Where is the rest of your party,—the twenty-nine men I gave you?"

"Gone! Gone! All gone as snow goes from the peaks in Summer weather. They are all gone, *señores;* and who shall say that God will not require their blood at my hands? The 'blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.' Some of it was very blighted seed, I fear me. When do you march, *señor?*"

"As soon as you can set my column on the route," said Coronado briefly. "To-morrow."

"I fear me you must wait a day. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. I will do better than write you a report, *Señor Conquistador.* I will march with you."

"You? Why, man, another month of it would kill you. Even the king himself would not ask it of you——"

"A higher than any earthly king commands it. It may be written that I am to lift the cross in the marketplaces of the Seven Cities. In the mean time, *señor,* though I march with you in two days—with the—best will—in the—world—I—can—do—no more——"

He reeled against the table and slipping to the floor lay quiet. Kindly hands raised him and bore him to a chamber, where eager women brought him hot *chocolatl,* for he would not touch the wine. Mendoza turned to his guests.

"I too bid you good night, *caballeros!* The expedition will start the day after tomorrow. Again I toast you—To all bold adventurers, and a double health to Don Francisco de Coronado, the *adelantado* of Cibola."

They drank.

II

DAYBREAK found Andres hard at work at his new tasks. As scoutmaster for Coronado, he would have no light labors. On him would fall all responsibility for the right road being taken, for camps supplied, under God, with water, wood and forage, for negotiations with what Indians they might meet and a score of other details.

"Here—" to a man who sat splicing a lance stave—"do not splice a lance. Get a new shaft. None but a fool would trust his life to a mended stave.

"You—" to another, who was fitting reins to a bridle—"never use leather reins in a campaign where your life may hang on your control of your horse. An Indian cuts at the head. If the reins be cut, you can not turn your horse. Put a short chain next the bits."

The man nodded knowingly to his neighbor.

"A proper man to lead our scouts. Whence comes he?"

"Out of the south, men say. All good men come from the south. I was born far to the south myself."

More than once Coronado, checking his tallies of men and supplies, dropped them all to see how his new scoutmaster had taken hold. He came back with a satisfied air. He had not been mistaken in his man. All was well. He had picked the man of all men for the place.

The quick braying of a trumpet brought him to his feet and to the window, from which he saw a great crowd pouring into the plaza, where a small platform had been erected overnight, on which men were draping the golden flag of Spain along with a blue standard on which showed the red crescents of the great house of Fonseca.

"What is taking place?" he asked of a passing soldier.

Mendoza, entering the door behind him, answered:

"Fonseca makes the yearly gathering of the king's taxes. It is a sight well worth seeing. In all the years that you have lived in New Spain have you never seen it?"

"Never. I have lived on the frontier, winning new lands for the king. Once the lands are conquered and the cattle herded by us soldiers, worthy civilians come to do the milking."

Mendoza laughed.

"Dare you tell that to Fonseca? He thinks he is a better soldier than fiscal. Here is your scoutmaster. What now, Don Andres?"

"A tally of the men and guns, *señores*."

"Let the tally wait," said Mendoza. "Come with me. I see the ladies seating themselves upon the platform, and yonder goes Fonseca. Let us go to the plaza and see the fiscal shear his sheep."

On the platform, Fonseca had seated himself by Mercedes. She bowed coldly, whereat he only laughed.

Behind them were gathered the officers and ladies of the vice-gerent's court, for the tax-gathering was a formal occasion. The platform arranged for the fiscal filled one side of the square. To each side was formed a mail-clad guard standing rigidly beneath the red and green and yellow *peloncillos* on their short lances.

On the fourth side was gathered a great crowd of Indians who had come from every *barrio* of that district, with the taxes that they must pay from their concessions granted them by the governor.

They bore packages and rolls of every sort and description, for there were many commodities among them. Some were wrapped in white cotton cloth, some in delicate buckskin that had been chewed by the women to make it soft and pliable when wet; others again, and these were the real center of attraction for Spanish eyes, were little cubes, perhaps a foot square, wrapped in carefully corded rawhide tied with thongs.

The governor and Coronado took their places next the fiscal, who glowered at Andres as the scoutmaster took his place behind the chair where Mercedes sat.

She dropped her glove and half turned as he quickly picked it up, acknowledging with a bow and smile her—"*Gracias, señor.*"

"*No hay de qui, señorita.*"

"You are a stranger—I should say were a stranger till last night, were you not?"

"I thank you. I feel a stranger no longer."

"You came from the south, did you

not? Don Francisco—" she nodded her head at Coronado—"says brave swords come from the hot countries."

"They are as God made them, *señorita.* Steel from the south, and wine and roses and women and all other beautiful things from Spain. That is what my father taught me as a boy—I believe him. For many years I have known the wine and the roses——"

"Do you really march with Don Francisco tomorrow?"

"If the saints are willing. Is it not an appeal to every Spaniard? Think of it, *señorita!* New lands to be won! New peoples to be won over to the cross; it may be idols overthrown as we did of old time in this very land."

"They tell me that you were here with Cortez, that you too were a *conquistador.* Is it true?"

"I was fourteen years old. I was a very paladin, *señorita.*" He laughed lightly. "Ask Bernal Diaz, the hard-handed old captain of Cortez. Once he had me flogged with a stirrup-leather for stealing his food."

The girl joined in his laugh.

"What are they about to do now?" she asked.

"I have been told they are about to collect taxes for the king; the Royal Fifth of all the income of the land."

"What becomes of the other four-fifths of what is collected?"

"Doubtless some of it sticks to the fingers that collect it. The saints know! I am very sure that when a man thrusts his finger into a honey-pot, it does not come out clean."

Two men dragged a set of scales from under the platform and placed them before the fiscal. He gave a signal to the captain of the guard and the Indians, carrying their bundles, fell into column. The leading native approached the platform and laid his tithe on the edge of the dais.

"Ten robes of featherwork," a clerk read from a great book.

"Correct. Next man?"

The Indian passed on.

So they came, man after man, each depositing his offering before the fiscal; featherwork as delicate as the finest lace of Flanders and in colors outvying the rainbow was there; boxes of fresh *chocolatl* from the lowlands; pearls from the coast, all brown from the fire, for the Spaniard encouraged haste in the Indian labor. Pearls taken by fire from the oyster were brown but the color could be restored.

Dainty cotton fabrics were there too and drawn work that one could pass through a finger ring. All these, men eyed eagerly as they were piled to one side. From time to time an obsequious servant bore around a huge tray and flagon of wine with massive golden cups, which, after the fiscal had helped himself, was passed to the other officers.

"What are yonder scales for?" asked Mercedes.

"You will see in a little or I am much mistaken."

Nearly all the Indians had paid their tribute by this time and there remained only a little group of hard-bitten workers from the placer mines of the north, the old-time treasure house of Anahuac.

A MAN came forward bearing a package covered with rawhide. A soldier cut the thongs and, tearing off the cover, turned the contents into the scale-pan. As one man the crowd drew forward, watching the pile of yellow dust and nuggets cascading into the pan. The soldiers weighed it carefully.

"Ah-h! How much?"

"Perhaps five hundred *pesos duros.* Wine for a year, Pedro *mio.*"

"Yes, but not for us. See the next."

The next man had more gold and added it to a small earthen jar that, emptied, showed as many small emeralds as a man might hold in the palm of his hand.

"It is the treasure house of the world," whispered Andres. "And here comes the old guardian."

He was an old, a very old Indian, and he tottered as he walked, with the deadly weakness of extreme old age. His package was so small as to excite comment from the fiscal.

"You, Tematli! I know your tricks! Where is the rest of your gold?"

"*Señor*"—the voice was weak and quavering—"my concession has failed. I can find no more gold there. The water failed in the stream so I could no longer work the cradles. A month since

my son died of the *varuala*—small-pox —I——"

"What care I what killed your son? Your business is to get gold for the king as it is mine to collect it. I fine you two pounds of gold in addition to your regular tax. Take him away. Ho! More wine there! Will you take him away?"

For the old man had flung himself upon his knees and seized the edge of the fiscal's doublet and was striving with quivering chin and tear-wet eyes to tell his plight.

Another cup of strong wine made the fiscal furious, for the old suppliant still strove to make himself understood.

"Here! Tie him up and you, Pedralto, give him a dozen blows of thy whip to teach him manners."

No more than a hint to that rough soldiery was needed. In a second the old man was tied to a great post that stood before the platform, his withered hands high above his head, his shrunken shoulders wincing in anticipation, while Pedralto, with a malicious grin, whirled a heavy rawhide quirt about his head.

"How many blows, Señor Fiscal?"

"The old-time Jewish measure, forty stripes save one. By the Five Wounds! Are there two applicants for the king's mercy this day?"

A young man stepped forward from the crowd and spoke a few words to Tematli tied to the post. Presently he turned and spoke to the fiscal, who was black with anger.

"I, Hemalco, tell you, *señor,* that the old man has spoken the truth. His concession is worked out. He has no gold. If you will let him go we will make up his fine among us."

"And take his flogging too? Shalt have one for yourself."

"Hold!"

Mercedes' voice cut like a whip-lash as she rose from her chair and stepped forward, her chin held high, her blue eyes flashing, her beautiful face as pale as carved ivory.

"Who spoke?" The fiscal lurched as he sat.

"I! I said 'Hold'! It shall not be! I am the governor's ward! His word is law in New Spain and, speaking for him, I say that this brutality shall not be."

Fonseca shook his head with drunken obstinacy.

"Too much talk," he said sullenly. "But one woman can give orders here and that woman is my betrothed wife. She can give an order in my name. Do you give it so, Señorita Mercedes?"

"Too high a price, my lord." Andres pushed his way forward. "The *señorita* is right. It runs not with Spanish honor to treat so harshly a man who is so clearly past the working age. In the name of pity, *señor,* revoke your order."

"Strike, man! Strike! There is too much talk here! What matters an Indian more or less?"

The fiscal was furious. Andres spoke again.

"Señor Fonseca, a young Indian has pleaded to you for justice; the most beautiful lady in all New Spain has asked you in the name of mercy. Now I——"

"Will you flog that man, Pedralto, or must I do it myself?"

The fiscal sprang from his seat, seized the whip from the soldier and was about to strike the cringing Tematli when Andres, with a half-scornful gesture, thrust him to one side, sending him sprawling. Instantly he was up and, pulling from his belt his long embroidered gloves, struck at Andres' smiling face.

Struck drunkenly and the next moment felt on his wind-pipe an iron hand that shut off his breath while a voice fairly hissed in his ear:

"Fiscal or no fiscal, you drunken swine! You have struck the *señorita.* If I had the right to act for her, I would send three feet of white steel through you this day! *Señorita*—" Andres swept off his hat in a bow—"he was drunk. He did not mean it."

"A quaint excuse——"

"There can be no excuse. It was a reason——"

She drew herself up like a queen.

"I know—I understand—I have seen him before. He will pay! Be assured that he will make amends, *señor.* If there be any justice in all New Spain rest assured that I will have it."

She whirled off across the plaza and Fonseca turned to Andres.

"Hanger on of lackeys! A scoutmaster indeed. This night you shall sup sorrow."

"I trust you will help it with a steel blade then. At what hour will it please your Excellency? I fear it must be early, for I leave with Don Francisco in the morning, when, if there be justice with the saints, the king will have to appoint another fiscal."

The crowd opened and closed again behind him as Coronado pushed his way through the throng.

"You, Andres! And Fonseca! Brawling? And before natives? This will never do! What means this?"

"Nothing, Don Francisco. This very sober and most polished fiscal of the king has been pleased to beat an old man, to strike the Señorita Acasta in the face when she asked for mercy for him and to invite me to a party. I have accepted."

"It shall not be." Coronado's voice grew stern. "Andres, have I not had trouble enough of my own but you must cause me more?"

He drew Andres to one side.

"You are not a thoughtless boy, Andres. We can not answer with a sword-thrust all who offend us. Remember Pedrarias. We can not go into the wilderness tomorrow and leave behind us an enemy powerful for harm. That was what killed Balboa, what deposed Cortez, what murdered Pizarro. No, no, my prince of scoutmasters, you must give me your word that you will not fight with the fiscal and that you will go to your quarters and stay there till I summon you."

Every word carried conviction with it. Coronado was right. The welfare of the expedition could not be imperiled to please the whim of one man.

"Give me your word," insisted the *conquistador,* "that you will not fight that man and that this affair shall go no further."

"He is really not fit for the sword of a *caballero,*" said Andres, glancing scornfully at Fonseca, who was drunkenly straightening his points. "I give you my word."

"Good! You have relieved my mind of much worry. Go now to your quarters and stay there. I will see that a good supper is sent you. I can take no chance tonight, Andres. The fiscal might reach you in his drunken folly and force a quarrel on you. A fight with the king's fiscal and I would leave behind me tomorrow all the Fonseca family and the governor as well banded against me. Now I am very sure that nothing can delay us tomorrow. God send you good luck, Andres de Avilez."

"And you too, *señor.*"

ANDRES went to his room, a large, bare apartment, furnished simply enough after the fashion of the day, with a huge bed of wood and rawhide, a chair and an immense *olla* for water.

"A pretty mess—very nearly."

He unhooked his great cloak of dark yellow cloth lined with lighter satin and flung it into the dark embrasure of the long window that opened above his head into the street outside. It was filled with iron portales, like grill-work, that made the room look like a cage.

"In five minutes more I would have done all that Don Francisco feared and would have cleared the score for the beautiful Mercedes. Saints! What eyes she has! And hair the color of ripe corn! Have I wandered from San Lucar de Borremeo to Vera Cruz only to find my fate in the hands of a young girl in Anahuac?"

He sat on the edge of the bed, his head in his hands.

"Mercedes—a beautiful name surely! But Avilez would fit it better than Acasta. By all the gods of heathen Rome, if I were not marching tomorrow with Coronado, I would make them show cause why they will marry this January and May. Why should she marry that old ape? Bah! How dark it grows. Am I to have no light?"

He shouted for a servant but none came. They were having a fandango in one of the smaller courts and heard nothing, so Andres pulled his chair before the open door and sat looking moodily out into the empty *patio,* listening to the raucous singing of the house-servants.

An hour passed. He got out a whetstone and fell to whetting his sword as it lay across his knees. A man passed him, walking slowly across the shaded opening of the door. Again two men crossed the *patio.*

"What an easy thing it would have

been to have sent three feet of white steel through that drunken fiscal!"

He remembered the burst of blue flame in Mercedes' eyes as the fiscal's gloves had struck her cheek and her appealing look as she glanced at him.

A servant came into the court-yard bearing a brazier filled with burning charcoal. Andres called to the man, who, startled, gave one short look and, turning, ran for the main gate that led from the *patio* to the street.

Half-laughing, half-angry, wholly chilled and provoked, Andres pursued at speed. It was ten yards through that main gate; a short ten yards with the scared servant leading. He turned into the street, dropped the brazier and sprang around the nearest corner. As Andres turned in behind him, a man dashed into him at top speed and knocked him flat in the middle of the road. Instantly the stranger threw his arms about him and set up an outcry.

"Here he is, *amigos!* To me all servants of the king! I have him here, I say!"

And before Andres could do more than twist himself half-loose, a dozen soldiers of the guard had seized him and whirled him up the street to the next house, where a great lantern set upon the stone pavement threw a ring of smoky light in the main entrance. In that circle of light stood Coronado, Governor Mendoza and the officer of the guard.

"Bring him here."

The voice of the governor was very stern and his face was set like flint. Coronado, too, was very grave as Andres was brought before them. While they stood at gaze, before any one spoke there was an uproar behind them and a groom forced his way through the gathered soldiers.

"The red stallion is gone, Señor Governor. He has broken his halter."

Mendoza turned upon him, hot with anger.

"Are misfortunes never to cease? Send men after him at once." He turned to Andres. "Señor Avilez, did you have angry words tonight with the fiscal, Señor de Fonseca?"

"I did. A few. They did not amount to much."

"Did a challenge pass between you?"

"Men might call it a challenge. I looked upon it as an invitation. It was disregarded afterward."

Coronado broke in with—

"You gave your word, Andres, that the matter should go no further and to have nought to do with the fiscal till I should give you leave."

"I did," said the wondering Andres. "I have not left the *patio* till this very minute, when I pursued a fleeing servant who was carrying a brazier that I wanted."

"How then, *señor,* do you account for this?"

They stepped apart and the astounded Andres, looking at a huddled heap between them, saw an inert body lying in the pathway. It was the body of the fiscal and his head and neck were swathed in the yellow cloak that Andres always wore, that he had left in his room that very night. The man lay on his face, and in his back, standing straight up, was the dagger with the hilt of gold and tortoise-shell that Andres had picked from the floor when Mercedes had dropped it.

He was thunderstruck.

"Is not that your cloak about his neck and head?"

"Yes—I——"

"Have you seen that dagger before?"

"I have."

"Did you have it this evening?"

"Yes, I did—for a moment after I had picked it up."

"Who did you give it to?"

"I do not remember. Some one who said they would return it to the owner took it. A stranger to me. I gave it up at once."

"One moment, *señor.* The thing is serious. The dagger belongs to my ward. All men know that. We will go to my house and have her give what explanation she has of its loss. Take up the body, you men, and go direct to my house."

Arrived there, he ushered his party direct into the long salon that filled the floor above the entrance.

"Send to me Maria, at once."

A servant left hastily and Mendoza turned to his party.

"Maria is the servant; in fact the foster-mother of my ward. Mercedes was born here twenty years ago. Her

father took her to Spain but sent her out here to me when he was in his last sickness. She has lived here ever since. The old woman loves her as she loves her God, I think. Here she is."

A middle-aged Indian woman entered the room and bowed to the governor. She showed signs of having been pretty in her youth that seemed long past, and her eyes had the fearful, questioning look of one who has seen much suffering.

"Maria, go to your mistress's room and ask her to join me here at once."

Followed ten, then twenty minutes of waiting: then a woman's startled scream rang through the long hall. Mendoza, with an oath, whipped out his sword and sprang for the door. Coronado stood still, eying the unflinching Andres. Presently the door flung open and Maria ran in. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes were wide with terror.

"*Señores! Señores* all! She is gone! Her room is empty!"

"How can she be gone? Where has she gone? It is your business to know! Where is she?"

"*Señor,* indeed I know not. I helped her to bed a little while ago. Perhaps an hour since. See! The bed has been slept in——"

While she spoke, the woman had led them along the hall to the girl's room, the door of which stood open. With a startled oath Mendoza, followed by the others, entered the room. Maria's words were true. The dainty white bed was all torn to pieces, two chairs had been upset and a bottle of perfume spilled on the floor.

"What the devil! The room opens direct on the *patio* and there were guards there. Why should she not be here? If she has gone out the guards should have seen her?"

The guards swore one and all that no one had passed that night from the house. Where could the girl have gone unattended at such an hour?

Andres had walked over to the far side of the room to see what could be seen from the open window that gave upon the great city plaza. They saw him quicken to a run and spring to the embrasure of the window.

"Look!" he shouted. "Look!"

The portales had been cut as though they had been made of soft wood instead of iron bars, and from the ledge a rope made of twisted sheets hung from the sill to the side-walk twelve feet below.

Mercedes was gone.

III

CORONADO was the first to break the silence.

"This puts a new face upon the matter, I take it. Question Maria further, Mendoza."

Maria, no longer the broken woman who had first faced them, drew herself up. She was now the foster-mother, demanding an accounting for her ward.

"I know this," she burst forth. "I know that she came home late from the tax-gathering and that she was weeping. Not from weakness, Señor Governor! No one ever saw an Acasta weep from that! No! No! She was angry, for she had been struck by the—the—man selected by the governor to be her husband. Struck before marriage, too. I put her to bed and soothed her. She was wrought up. A little later I left her."

"Did she wear this dagger in her hair when you disrobed her?"

"I do not remember. I think not. She can not have gone far, *señores.* It must be that angered and excited she has gone out to think matters over so that she can lay the matter before the governor, her guardian."

"Hm! That sounds reasonable. Andres, can you tell us any more about the matter?"

"Not I, Señor Conquistador. True it is that my cloak was wrapped about his ugly head. It is also true that I had the dagger early in the evening and that this precious fiscal of the king and I had some words. I tell you frankly, Señor Governor"—he turned on Mendoza—"that could I have faced your friend early in the evening after he had insulted the Señorita Acasta, I would have run him through with no more compunction than I would have felt for killing a worm, but I kill as a soldier, not as a murderer. Andres de Avilez leaves no wounds in the backs of his enemies—except in those who run."

"Did you leave your room this night?"

"Only as I told you, to pursue the man who carried the brazier that I wanted to warm my room."

"*Señores*"—one of the soldiers of the guard stepped forward—"I can say a word on this. I was in the *patio* of the house where the scoutmaster slept. As I was about to leave I saw a man pass me who had his head and throat wrapped in a yellow cloak. If it was not the one that we found, it was very like it. The man walked low along the wall where the scoutmaster's room was. I went on about my business and a little later came the cry that the fiscal had been killed and Señor Avilez appeared running.

"Did the man you saw resemble Señor de Avilez?"

The man looked steadily at Andres for a moment.

"All cats are gray in the dark. How can I tell? I only know that I saw a man in a yellow cloak. I saw the cloak as he passed the lighted window and ran through the *patio*—and they say that Señor Avilez wears always a yellow cloak."

"And—"Mendoza took the word—"the cloak found about the head of the murdered fiscal was the cloak of Señor Avilez. That, I believe, is unquestioned."

"While the dagger," put in Coronado, "was the dagger that Señorita Acasta owned and wore in her hair. She also had a great grievance against Fonseca and she has disappeared. Where is she? She can tell us much."

"I will have search made at once. She may have gone to any one of a half dozen houses of our friends. You—" he turned to his majordomo, who had joined them—"send men at once to the houses of Castaneda, to Lupa—send to all my friends and ask that if the *señorita* be there she be requested to return here at once on an important matter."

For an hour they waited, and as each messenger came back and told that the girl could not be found, Mendoza grew more worried.

"There must be a house-to-house search then," he exclaimed when the last man had reported. "Send the guard!"

That was fruitless too. There was no sign of the missing Mercedes and the city was now very thoroughly aroused.

"I can not fathom this. You can not go tomorrow, my friend. I must hold your scoutmaster till we adjust this matter."

"But, your Excellency, I depend on Avilez to lead my scouts."

"I tell you, Coronado, I must hold him for trial by the king's commission. This is not as though a mere native had been killed. The man was a Fonseca. As between ourselves I may frankly add that I owed him much. If he has been killed and none held responsible for it, men will say that Mendoza found a short way to pay his debts."

"And if I be tried and found guilty on the evidence as shown," quoth Andres softly, "men will say that the great governor Mendoza who owed much money to the fiscal found a short way to pay his debts and then blamed the murder on—a better man."

Mendoza started as if stung.

"A better man? I am the governor. A better man?"

"I said a better man. Can you as governor find a trail on a starless night? Can you find drink in a waterless land? Can you live for days without supplies in a barren country? Can you induce masterless men to give up hard-won gold? We did all this in Honduras, Señor Governor. I tell you more. I say that if any man, be he governor or horse-boy, says that Andres de Avilez had any hand in this murder, he lies in his throat."

The governor laid hand upon his sword. Andres went on:

"I make you a proposal. Murder has been done. I claim that I did not do it and I will stake my honor that your fair ward had no knowledge of it. This is the last outlying Spanish town. After I leave here there is no other town to which I could escape. I can not escape to the Indians for protection. Death by the headsman's ax would be preferable to life among the Indians. See now, *señor*, I ask that you allow me to accompany Don Francisco de Coronado in his search for Cibola. There is no way by which I can escape from his control, even if I wished to do so, and by going I may be of use to him and to the king. Then too, who knows where the Señorita de Acasta is? It may be that I may find some trace of her. In the mean time, do

you have search made through all your district for the man who murdered the fiscal. I am content to leave the matter in your hands until I can return. In the mean time Don Francisco will stand sponsor for my reappearance and I can do much to help him."

Mendoza was frankly puzzled till Coronado spoke:

"He says well, my friend. The quest for the Seven Cities must not be held up for any one man—and he dead. I will not be gone a year. If Andres here dies on the trip, it is only what you would do to him if he be tried and found guilty by our Spanish law. If he lives, I promise you on the word of a Spanish *caballero* that he will return for trial. In the meantime my word is: 'Find the girl.' You will find that she knows more of it than we suspect or will admit. What say you?"

Mendoza thought for some time. What Andres and Coronado urged was perfectly true. Once he should leave with Coronado there was no road by which he could escape. The expedition had been a very costly one to prepare and the Court at Madrid looked for great returns from it. It was by no means sure that Andres was guilty and Spanish justice was slower than death itself. Why not let him go with Coronado, who would be answerable for his return? He nodded slowly.

"You can go," he said presently. "And in spite of your rebellious words tonight, I pledge myself as one gentleman of Spain to another, to allow no word of libel to be spread about you during your absence and to see, on your return, that you have a fair trial. Can I do more? It is settled then, and I will say good night, gentlemen. Do you start tomorrow?"

"At daylight. Fray Marco has sent me word in another of his precious scraps of Scripture, telling me that he will join me at daylight at the gate. We march at daybreak."

"I will be at the main gate, then, to send you forth in royal style. Sleep well."

He received and returned the formal salute of the two and strode off into the night. Coronado started to speak but Andres cut him short.

"Not a word, Don Francisco, if you please. You have done enough this night. I need no words from you to tell me that you do not believe that I have done this vile thing. I too am very sure that when the girl is found that she will be found to be equally innocent, but God knows how we can prove it. I will go to my men to see that all is ready for the start at daybreak."

He went to the great plaza of the city, where the watch-fires of his Indians had burned low. The three hundred Spaniards were billeted in the neighboring houses, from which came sounds of all-night revelry. The horses and mules snorted and pawed on their picket lines, for the night was cold and a cutting wind was blowing.

What an adventure it was after all! It needed just this one thing to give the real zest to it, for now he was gambling with his neck in the noose. Well, he had done it before!

How he had squirmed and twisted on that day with Cortez when they had lowered him with ropes into the flaming hell of Popocatepetl's crater to get sulfur to make the powder for the guns of the *conquistador!* He had the same feeling now.

He would have a year's reprieve at least, and much could happen in a year, and in the meantime there was Cibola that Fray Marco had actually seen. Let him once win to Cibola and the death of twenty fiscals would not be held against him. A dozen queries as to Cibola, Fray Marco, Mercedes, flashed through his brain and they all came back to one query—

"What had happened to Mercedes?"

What had happened to Mercedes?

HURT in mind and body, and furiously angry at having had her request for mercy denied, deeply insulted by the drunken grossness of Fonseca, she had left the plaza and had gone straight to her apartments in the house of the governor.

Servants who saw her as she entered scarcely knew her, so greatly had she changed from the laughing, happy girl they saw every day. Maria, her foster-mother, had been quick to see that something was wrong. She followed the girl

to her room and encouraged her to talk. At first the words came with difficulty, but later in a storm of anger and breaking passion.

"Marry me to that—that—drunken swine! Maria, you have taken care of me since my mother died. You know what I am and what he—Fonseca—is? I tell you I will die before I marry him—and then to have been struck by him—and before the stranger—the ——"

"I know. The brown-haired stranger who goes as scoutmaster—when the saints made him they made a man."

"What do you know of him, Maria?"

"Only what the men say who came from the south. They say that he is the surest sword in all the south country, and that he is not really dangerous till the smile leaves his eyes and settles about his lips."

For an hour Maria sat and talked to her foster-daughter about any and every thing that came into her mind and first and foremost in all these was Andres. She tried to soothe and quiet the girl but to no purpose. Talk Mercedes must and would, and gradually as she talked she infused into her old nurse a little of the flame of resentment that she herself had felt. Already by that miraculous underground system that the Indians have, Maria had heard four different versions of the affair, and now she had it fully from the lips of the person she loved most on earth. She listened attentively. Presently:

"Thou must sleep! Sleep, my bird. Maria will make *chocolatl* for thee."

"No. I want no *chocolatl*. Talk to me. Your voice soothes me like falling waters."

"So thy mother said before thee. When I have made the *chocolatl* I will talk again."

She hastened from the room and Mercedes lay back upon her bed, her hands pressed to her aching temples.

"Marry her to that pig!" Maria fairly hissed the words. "Truly these white masters of ours force things to an issue. It had been bad enough under the old gods to trample upon those who were vanquished, but even the rulers of old-time Anahuac had spared themselves. To give away my little girl as a native hunter in the old days would give away an ocelot— It shall not be! Thou, Xoton."

A boy sprang from his serape by the fire in the *patio*.

"Fetch me fresh *chocolatl* and eggs."

"Now—" when he had brought them —"run to the Indian camp where the men are who paid tribute this day. Fetch Hemalco and tell him I would see him and then forget that I sent thee."

When the boy had gone, Maria went slowly to the far side of the *patio* to a little patch of earth that had once been a house garden. She carefully examined the stunted remains of a few plants and finally, kneeling before a small cactus, she stripped from it a few leaves, thrust them up her sleeve and slowly moved away and went into the kitchen.

Once inside the room, she threw the leaves into an earthen pan, added a handful of salt, some water and a pinch of copal, put it on the fire and then, chin in hand, sat by and watched it simmer.

Presently a sharp, acrid smell diffused itself through the room, a smell that gripped the throat and almost choked Maria as she sat with her serape close drawn about her face. When the brew had boiled down to the consistency of thick paste she added a small quantity of it to the *chocolatl*. It immediately turned a rich blood color and a moment later had changed again to its own deep brown tint. Carefully throwing the remains of the cactus leaves into the fire, she took the earthen cup and went to the room where Mercedes lay.

The strain under which the girl was laboring had not lessened. Maria looked at her and, as she watched, her eyes darkened with wrath toward those who had brought this grief and pain to the one she loved most on earth.

If there were a man in Culiacan this night—Holy Virgin!—how quick he would have been to resent this wrong to her mistress! Was there any to whom she could appeal?

"Drink this."

She held the cup to Mercedes' lips.

"None can say that Maria can not brew a cup that brings sleep. Drink, I say, and, when you wake, all grief will have fallen from you."

Mercedes took it, tasted, murmured

her thanks and drank deep. Presently came Nepenthe.

It was the little-known *peyotl* of the Aztecs, one of the strongest narcotics known, the use of which is now forbidden to the Indians of the Southwest by a paternal Government. Few know it; fewer still know how to prepare it. The secret has been well preserved among the tribes and there are not today a hundred white men who know even its name.

To the poor Indian of those days, laboring on enforced tasks for his Spanish masters, it was the only thing that gave him solace, for *peyotl* attacks the memory centers of the brain and leads the drinker by easy and gradual steps to a Nirvana that is more wonder-filled than any of De Quincey's dreams.

For that very reason the Spanish laws forbade it to the Indians, who were immoderate in its use and were rendered incapable of any labor for many days. When a dominant race can forbid to the conquered the right to forget their wrongs, it has gone far on the path of conquest.

Mercedes drank, cautiously at first, then greedily. The pupils of her eyes dilated slowly as the potent drug took hold. Presently she slipped down in the bed. Followed a brief period when she strove and struggled till Maria had to hold her in bed by main force.

Soon the frenzy passed and she felt a heaving motion under her as if she were on a ship at sea, then a feeling of suffocation and of lights, lights that formed and broke inside her brain in great swarming circles of sparks. Again came the tramp of passing thousands—Maria's voice saying—"It will do. Take it and go"—and then peace.

Long afterward she never felt sure how long the spell had lasted. There were times when the brain, striving to react to normal, almost but never quite functioned properly. There were hours when the inert body strove to regain its poise but it never quite succeeded. For hours she lived and moved in an uncertain way and the tired brain never recorded a sensation. It was a veritable death in life. That is what *peyotl* does, leaving the mind and body open to suggestion, to which they reply as certainly as a subject of hypnosis responds to the suggestion of the dominant mind.

So passed four hours of Mercedes life, of which she was never to have any recollection.

IV

THE cocks crowed Andres out of his blankets, and when the noise and turmoil had subsided, he set to work to whip his men into shape for the march.

Coronado, armed cap-à-pie, met him in the plaza and reined in his horse to let the long column file past him as it took the field, intent on that great mission. First came a body of a hundred horsemen under Andres, a gay mass of color with the painted *peloncillos* fluttering gaily from their lance points.

Following them came the main battle, composed of arquebusiers and crossbowmen bearing their own weapons, clad in steel helmets and jerkins heavily quilted with cotton that would turn an Indian arrow. Along with these went the six *falconets,* drawn by mules, and after them, rank behind rank of the Indian auxiliaries aglow with all their savage panoply of wooden helmets, leather shields adorned with the vivid colors of savage heraldry.

These were armed with swords of toughened wood, with the deadly *macahuitl,* long clubs shaped like modern hockey sticks, on the inside curves of which were set great flakes of sharp obsidian that the Aztecs called *itztli,* that cut like knives.

Deadly blow-guns from the south were there too, and most deadly of all, the long sixteen-foot, copper-headed pikes of Chinantla. Behind them came the women and the camp servants with the five hundred pack animals, and, in rear of these, the droves of two hundred bullocks, sixty horses, five thousand sheep and two thousand swine, all kept up by the patient rear guard.

Very gallantly they filed out of the gate, where, at a signal from Mendoza, the lances of the guard clanged down in a last salute.

"Success." He waved his gauntleted hand at them. "Here is your guide."

He patted on the shoulder the grim-

faced Fray Marco, who in a new cassock strode down to meet them.

"My good fray! You can not come afoot! Ho! A horse there for the fray!"

"No horse for me, *señor.* My Master rode an ass into Jerusalem. Shall I be more proud than he? No! No! I go afoot, as I have gone through life. Shall I go with the advance?"

"If you will have it so. A few miles out and the Indian trailers will work to the front, and the pace will be slow so that the herds can keep up. Trumpeters, sound a point of war in honor of the governor."

So with fluttering pennons, glancing arms and prancing steeds, followed by a thousand Indians and by his flocks and herds, accompanied by three hundred Spanish soldiery, the cream of the adventurers of all the Gold Coast, the Señor Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, most brilliant of all the gallant *conquistadores* of Spain, passed out of the little frontier town of Culiacan in Sonora, in the year of grace 1540.

The real roads stopped at Culiacan. All beyond that was *tierra incognita.* The Indians had no pack animals and used only foot trails. Over hill and valley the narrow trails ran, broad brown ribbons deep with dust. Mile after mile the land unfolded before them; ridge above ridge, to right and left, crowned with oak and stunted piñon pine along the crests. Along the base of the hills the ugly prickly-pear showed in flecks of unhealthy-looking green, with here and there a clump of *choya,* now yellowing into bloom, or *ocatilla* with its red fire-point.

"Holy Mary! What a country!" quoth Andres. "You have seen it all, Fray Marco. Does it improve as we advance?"

Fray Marco smiled pityingly as Andres spoke.

"See now, my son. Until I passed over this land no Spaniard had ever seen it and but few Indians. When God made it, then, He must have made it to please Himself. What is good enough to please God, *señor,* should be good enough for you and me."

Andres chuckled grimly. Here was a man of parts.

"It shall be," he said with a pious oath. "You are right. How far is it to water?"

"I do not know. I paid no attention to such carnal vanities."

"My friend, when you have made a dozen camps without water, you will not call it a carnal vanity. When you scouted this land, were you never without water?"

"I suppose I must have been. I do not remember."

"You scouted it, did you not?"

"Ay, I did. I went to search for Cibola. That is, I marched but I never saw with the material eye. I was looking for higher things. When you study your own soul, you must watch with a single eye. Watching God's goodness to man, what have I to do with wood or water?"

Andres looked at him keenly.

"Man's salvation depends on water or I read the scriptures wrong. Did you make no mental note of where we can find wood or grass or water?"

"Estevanico did but they killed him at Cibola. As I came back I walked. No doubt the saints directed me to water—like the wild ass of the desert."

"Very like," said Andres dryly. "Where are the men who went with you?"

"Gone! Gone! All gone," said the fray wildly. "Gone like the snows go from the highest peaks. It may be that God will require their blood at my hands, for I would not let them fight when fighting might have availed them. Some died of thirst in crossing the plains, four died of poison of the snakes, two perished in a quicksand and the rest in that awful fight when we came to Cibola. But I saw the city—Yes, *señor!* I saw the city——"

A clash of accoutrements behind them, and Coronado rode up. He had heard the last words.

"And what then, father? You have told us little enough about those cities."

"I traveled for two months, *señor,* and we came out upon a great ridge. We saw the city, and the armed men came out and would not let us enter it. Then Estevanico passed himself as a man of healing and won a standing with them. All this time they made us live on the

bare ridge above the town, where they made us a camp with nine women that Estevanico took for wives. There was a fight there—I do not remember much of it, *señores*—all that is clear is that Estevanico was crucified over an ant-hill and then I was awakened under a great cottonwood tree, and it was on the road to the Spanish cities."

"Are they rich?"

"Rich? *Señores,* I saw from that ridge the walls of the houses that were covered with silver sheets. Their lance points are of pure gold and on their shields and wooden helmets I saw emeralds and turquoises past all belief."

"You say that they will fight?" asked Andres, his eyes gleaming.

"All men will fight," said Fray Marco, crossing himself. "These men are not the descendants of the Christians that we sought—that we thought would live in Cibola. These men worship—"

"Yes. Go on."

"They worship a vile and filthy snake."

"A snake! Worship the father of evil?"

"He can teach them nothing. Where do we camp tonight?"

"At the trees yonder." Andres pointed to a thin line of cottonwoods in the offing. "There should be water enough in the pools yonder to supply our herds."

Fray Marco strode away across the hills toward the trees, leaving the two staring after him.

"A most pious and worthy fray," said Coronado presently.

"I have no doubt of it," said Andres dryly.

Coronado looked at him sharply.

"Has he told you all he knows?"

"He told that in less than five minutes, I think. He is no doubt a pious and worthy fray, but as a scout or guide he is the greatest fool that God ever allowed to press shoe-leather. He believes that because we do God's work, that God will victual us as He did Elijah of old time. I must get ahead with my men or the column will be closed on my heels."

Down they went, mile after mile, along that bitter trail. To one side the hills swept up in wave on wave of green and brown and red—raw, red earth on which no water fell. Below them it sloped away to the rocky fastnesses of a dry arroyo. Ahead of them a long sweep of arid country terminated at the narrow belt of green that marked their camp. So they came down at last, the tired mules whinnying as they smelled the dampness. Horses whinny when they leave camp, mules when they reach it. In a short half-hour the smoke from a hundred dung-fed fires swirled up into the evening air.

ANDRES pushed on with the men he intended to place on out-posts for the camp. He had selected a low line of hills a few hundred yards to the north of the camp site. Two hundred yards out he met an Indian runner, heading excitedly for the fires. He was panting hard, and when he saw Andres he flung up his hand in warning.

"Come quickly, *señor!* There has been a fight here."

"A fight?" Andres spurred quickly forward, jerking his sword from the sheath.

The man led him around a turn in the trail and pointed to the bottom of the water-course.

"There, *señor!* Look!" was all he said.

Andres' eyes followed the pointing hand.

A hundred yards away a column of smoke swirled up from a long dead fire. Still farther away stood a small cottonwood tree and there, embracing the trunk with both arms, stood a tall Indian, his back toward them.

Andres swore a great oath and peered at the man from under the sharp of his hand.

"He is alone?"

"We have seen no sign of any other person."

"Come, then."

He pushed his horse at speed down the slope and swung out of saddle. The man at the tree never turned. A glance at him showed why. His face was close pressed against the smooth bark of the tree, his mouth was open and his tongue was spiked to the trunk by a great wooden peg that was driven through it.

"What devil's work is this? Cut the man loose."

It was easier said than done. They did

it finally by cutting through the tongue itself. The man promptly fainted and fell back in Andres' arms. He took a small flask of *toquila* from his pocket. A few drops of the fiery native brandy poured down the man's throat set him to groaning, for the liquor got into the open wound.

"Can he talk? What does he say? I do not know his language."

"*Señor,* he says that they were set upon at daylight. He says that he was one of a wood-cutters' camp. They were camped here for the night, when four men camped with them. They came out of the south and they had with them a lady on a red horse. She was sick and very tired, so they made a place for her to sleep. The men who accompanied her would not say where they came from nor where they were going. They only said that evil would come to any who told of their being there. They made a tent for the lady from their serapes and she slept. No guard was set. He says that very early this morning their camp was rushed by the men of the north and all but himself were killed. They fastened him to the tree because he killed three of them. They carried off the lady and the red horse."

Andres clutched his temples frantically.

"Tell me that again," he said.

The man repeated it, more slowly the second time.

"Can he show me the bodies?"

A careful examination showed that the man had told the truth. The embers of the fires still glowed under white ashes. Several long arrows sticking in the ground, their feathered ends to the north, showed whence they had been shot, and a small shelter that had been built of serapes had been trodden under foot.

Andres kicked the serapes to one side and saw a little heap of sage-brush; evidently a bed. To one side of this lay a tiny glove of white buckskin. He had seen that glove two days before, when he had picked it from the ground in the great square of Caliacan as he stood behind Mercedes' chair. Instantly the whole scene came back to him and he ground his teeth in impotent rage. A cold hand seemed to have closed upon his heart.

What was the solution to this problem? How could Mercedes de Acasta, the ward of the great governor, have been brought here? Certainly she could not have come of her own free will. That was beyond all doubt. She had been carried off! But how? And by whom? As in a vision he saw the lovely laughing face of Mercedes; saw it change to pity and sympathy as she had begged for the Indian. Then he saw those glorious eyes blaze with righteous anger as——

A clutch upon his arm brought him from his vision. Xicotl, the best of his Indian trailers, a man who had devoted himself to the scoutmaster since the hour when he first joined Coronado, stood beside him pointing to the ground.

Near a small tree the soft ground showed the clear prints of a horse's feet. Beyond a doubt the man's tale was true.

"Bring that man at once to the main camp."

Andres swung quickly into saddle and galloped headlong into the camp. Coronado sprang to his feet as his scoutmaster dashed up.

"What now, Andres?"

"Great news, *señor.* Whether of the best or worst I know not."

He told him briefly what he had seen.

Coronado sent a man back for the arrows, and sent for Fray Marco. The priest came quickly and, standing by Xicotl, looked his question.

"Do you know these men of the north? Who are they?"

Fray Marco shook his head. It was Xicotl who answered.

"*Señor,* they are the men of the wild tribes who live far to the north. They raid far to the south of their own countries every year, when the grass has not yet come green on the ranges. I have heard that in their own land is much game in the Spring and Summer, but when the grazing is poor the game leaves and the men raid our lands then. They rarely come this far to the west. They live on the upper waters of the Yaqui river that lies over there."

He pointed to the dark northeast.

"Who are they, Xicotl?"

"How can I tell, *señor?* They are said to be eaters of human flesh. I know not."

"Look at these arrows."

Coronado handed him the three arrows.

"These are northern arrows," said Xicotl. "See, *señor,* they are feathered with feathers that I know are from the sand-hill crane. We do not have it so far to the south. I have been in their country a little and I know. Also we make our arrows of longer wood than these. These are boys' weapons compared with ours."

"That settles it then!" Andres drove a heavy fist into the palm of the other hand. "Don Francisco, the girl has not run away. She has been abducted."

Coronado looked at him sharply.

"I think so too," he said. "But why and by whom and where to?"

"How can we tell? We know that the red stallion of the governor was stolen or broke loose. We know that the girl disappeared the same night and that no one in the town of Culiacan saw her. We know now that she has been carried off by Indians and taken to the north. It seems that the party of Indians which captured her were themselves attacked and killed and the girl carried off by the attackers."

"I will send word at once to Mendoza."

CORONADO stopped, his commands half uttered, for Andres laid a strong hand upon his arm.

"You must do much more than that, *señor!* Much more!"

"What then? What more can I do?"

"We must pursue them. Remember, Don Francisco, that a Spanish lady is at the mercy of savages who know no mercy."

"What then, man? Two thousand men can never travel fast enough to catch a dozen naked scoundrels who travel with the fear of death at their heels. I say no! I have risked my whole fortune on this quest. My fortune and my honor are alike involved. Can I then afford to squander men and horses on such an impossible search? I will send word to Mendoza and let him send out a party. I dare not do it. I say no!"

"You dare not refuse. No *caballero* of Spain dares refuse to succor a lady in distress."

"No, I do not. I refuse to play the part of a chivalrous fool when I have the welfare of two thousand men at stake."

Fray Marco strode forward, his eyes blazing but his face very calm.

"*Señor,* I, a priest of the church, ask it. I tell thee thy duty, man! There was a man once who had an hundred sheep and one strayed from the fold."

"I know. I have heard it before. Shepherds are always half-witted folk! He left the fold to the wolves and—"

Fray Marco and Andres stopped their ears at the blasphemy.

"—I tell you no! I am not a fool. I will not go——"

"Then is Don Andres a fool and so am I, a priest of the Lord, for doing as I know my Master would have me do——"

"The King?"

"The King of kings."

"Still you are wrong, Sir Priest, and I am right. This search can not be made by a crazy priest and a love-sick——"

Andres stopped him at the word.

"I am answerable to none but myself in such a matter. I go to search for her of course. What men can I take?"

"Fools all! You are my scoutmaster and would you leave me?"

"On such an errand, *señor,* I would leave paradise without a qualm."

"You can take a few men with you, of course, if you are set upon it, but none the less it is a fool's errand and I wash my hands of it."

"Can I take Xicotl with me? He is the best of the trailers."

"Yes, if he is fool enough to go with you."

Andres spoke rapidly to Xicotl. The man's face was a study. The taciturnity of the Indian gave place to surprize, then to amazement, and he looked Andres up and down.

"To follow the men of the north into their own country is to play with death, *señor,*" he said; "I have seen them before and I know."

"Then you are more than ever the man I seek. When we come back, Xicotl, the fairest ranch in all Sonora will be but a desert compared to the one that I promise you, and for myself I promise you a Spanish horse and cattle. Will you go or must I go alone?"

The man's eyes sparkled. The last words had struck fire from the flint.

"I will go, *señor,* but not for the ranch nor for the cattle. I go because I have found a man."

"Come, then."

In a moment he had laid aside his steel front and back pieces as being too hot and heavy for the trip that he must take. He took a long bow from one of the Spanish footmen, and quiver of arrows with a flint and steel with tinder, as well as two water-bags which he filled and laid across the saddle of his horse.

"Give me dried meat and corn-meal now, as much as two men can carry."

They too were fastened to the saddle and he turned to Fray Marco.

"Are you ready, friend?"

"Yes, I am ready." He turned to Coronado, who stood watching them, his eyes dark with wrath.

"We go, *señor,* and I tell thee this: In the dark hours that will come to thee as they come to every man born of woman, remember that God will demand from you the blood of this girl, and it may be ours too! God will exact a price of you! Wrong was never done yet in this world but the doer paid."

"Do you threaten me?" Coronado stepped forward angrily.

"No, I prophesy. Come, Don Andres."

They moved off up the trail, stopping at the still smoldering fires, and Coronado saw Xicotl bend over the long grass. Then he pointed to a narrow notch in the far ridge that topped the valley, and the three strode off with the pack-horse and were lost to view in the gathering dusk.

V

THE effect of *peyotl* dies slowly. Like opium taken in large doses, its most noticeable physical reaction is one of intense debility. Heightened nerve tension is followed by an equally strong revulsion, for the pendulum swings as far one way as it did the other.

Mercedes knew nothing of what had happened to her that night. Three hours had vanished absolutely from her memory, and all was as a hideous dream while it was being enacted. Later she remembered nothing of it. Her first knowledge came after the effect of the drug had worn off, when she found herself, sick, her head ringing as from a terrific blow, lying close under a small, tent-shaped roof that smelled most abominably like fresh, damp wool.

The smell was mingled with the smell of acrid wood smoke and primitive cooking. Low-voiced chatter came to her and once her ears, sharpened in their activities, caught the restive tramping of a tethered horse.

"What in the world has happened? Where am I?"

She strove to rise and bumped her head against the light pole that formed the ridge of her tent. Astonished, she crawled out into the coolness of the early dawn and stood gazing about her, utterly unable to comprehend what had taken place.

Four Indians sat huddled about a small fire that smoked and stunk in the dim starlight of the false dawn. To her left she saw the shadowy figure of a horse tied to a mesquite bush, though she did not know the tree by that name.

A guttural exclamation from one of the Indians who saw her brought the others to their feet, and they crowded about her with smiles and gestures that assured her, even in her terror, that no harm was intended.

"Who are you?" she demanded shrilly. "Who are you and how did I come here?"

The men looked at one another in silence and made no attempt to answer her. Clearly they did not understand Spanish. The girl, with the instinctive, authoritative air of a superior race, drew herself up, pointing with a scornful finger to one man who stood out before the rest. Her gesture was in itself a question.

He replied gutturally—

"Modoc."

Then with a gleam of intelligence he added—

"Xoton."

"Ah! Xoton."

The house boy had been a particular favorite of hers. She leaned forward and touched the hilt of the Spanish knife that hung in the man's belt and then pointed to her own breast. The man shook his head violently and indicated that no harm would come to her.

The girl's brain was in a whirl as she looked about the camp, now becoming

barely visible in the dim light of the early dawn. It was very clear to her, as she scanned the faces of the men about her, that she had been carried off from Culiacan and by strangers, for she knew none of the faces about her. The men wore no clothes of Spanish make; they spoke no word of Spanish. Who could they be and how had she fallen into their hands?

She remembered absolutely nothing, for *peyotl,* that dread eraser of all memory, had wiped clean the slate of her consciousness. The stamping of the tethered horse aroused her. Followed by the four men who carefully watched her every movement, she walked slowly over to the tree and looked at the horse. He was the favorite mount of the governor, the red Arab stallion that he had brought from Andalusia at a great cost. There would be a terrible reckoning for all this when the time should come for the accounting. Of that she was very certain.

She realized now that she had been very skilfully carried away from her own room in the very middle of the governor's guards. But who were the people who had dared do this and what was their motive if no harm was intended? Above all, why could she remember nothing of the events of that night? Her very brain rocked with the overwhelming mystery of it. It savored of art-magic. Instinctively she crossed herself as she reached for the rope that fastened the horse.

Modoc touched her arm and shook his head in denial. She persisted in reaching for the rope and very gently, as one would correct an erring child for its insistence, he pulled her hand away from the rope and motioned to the fire, where one of the Indians had already heaped the serapes that had formed her covering. Another was blowing the embers of the nearly dead fire.

That fire was fated never to glow again, for even as the man stooped over the embers there came a sudden whir that was followed by a shrill yell, and the man pitched forward on his face in the embers. The startled gazers were suddenly aware of a three-foot arrow that jutted from his throat and of a score of naked figures springing in and out among the brush.

Instantly her captors scattered in headlong flight, a mistake that they soon paid for. In a second that camp was alive with leaping, yelling savages.

THEY had crawled up to the nearest ridge under cover of the darkness, attracted by the smell of the wood smoke, and, after the fashion of Indians, had rushed the camp in the dawning.

What followed was organized murder, and when it was done, Mercedes, who early in the fight found herself held firmly by two men, saw, as one sees through a dense mist, the fire trampled out very carefully, three dead bodies in the short grass and the fourth man, Modoc, being dragged to a small cottonwood tree where he shrieked and screamed as something utterly abominable was done to him.

She did not see what it was, for she was most unceremoniously bundled to the back of the tired stallion, her feet were roped and tied beneath his belly, and ten minutes after the first alarm had been given she found herself riding at a walk up the hill, led by two savages, with ten others scattered along the trail in front of and in rear of her.

The world seemed to have dropped from under her feet. She had hardly begun to realize one dream as a horrible reality when this second one came. She felt that there must come a moment of awaking and that she would see Maria come in her room with a platter containing her rolls and *chocolatl.* What had happened?

She remembered very clearly that painful scene in the banquet-hall and the announcement that her guardian had made, her own indignant protest and the grinning face of de Fonseca as he tapped her familiarly upon the arm. All this stood out clearly in her memory.

Very distinct, too, was the recollection of the tall, broad-shouldered stranger from the south, Andres de Avilez—was that his name? He had kindly eyes and a mouth that showed every character line that one would expect to find in a leader of men, and Mercedes had heard Mendoza say that the mouth is the one true lineament that indexed character, because men make that for themselves. She could still see the quizzical glance

as he handed her the white buckskin glove that she had dropped—intentionally, to make the fiscal angry as Andres handed it back, as she intended that he should.

All these were clear, but plainer than all else was the memory of that scene in the plaza when they had dragged that old Indian forward and tied him to the post to be flogged.

She knew many of those people. Why should she not know them when she had lived for eighteen years of her life among them? Her impassioned though fruitless appeal to the fiscal for mercy had been based upon that knowledge.

She thought and thought, but there was an hiatus in her memory that all her striving could not bridge! Saints! How Andres de Avilez's eyes had flashed as he swung upon the drunken fiscal—what it would be to have with her now such a man as the scoutmaster of Coronado. But now . . .

Her very heart leaped into her throat. Her eyes filled and she clutched at her saddle pommel in dismay as she realized what an impossible future was hers. What could happen to her? Court-bred though she was, she had seen quite enough of the outlying Spanish frontier to know that these captors of hers were no lieges of the King of Spain. They were northern Indians. She could tell that by the paint that was rarely used by the tribes that had come in contact with Spain. Then too she noticed, almost subconsciously, that the two men who led the horse were afraid of him. It was very evident that they had not handled horses before—another proof that the men came from far beyond the Spanish marches!

The Indians near Spanish settlements had seen and handled many horses and had lost all fear of them. What then were these people doing here and where was "here," and why above all had she been brought here?

Hour after hour they plodded on. Once they crossed a water-course in which a little water still stood in the rock-ribbed pools. The men drank, and one of them scooped a little up in a bit of rawhide and handed it to her, but when the red stallion dropped his sweating muzzle into the cool water, he was remorselessly urged on. Sweat-marks stood out all over him and his head drooped from time to time. Once or twice he stumbled on the trail.

The sun rose and drove down upon them with all the fierce intensity that the mesas of northern Mexico know, almost baking the life-blood in the girl's veins. Still her captors urged her on and on. For twenty miles they almost ran along the "hog-backs" and the ridges and then left the mountains, heading direct across a great mesa that was covered with short grass, wherein little animals ran in and out of their holes, barking at the strangers as they passed.

They had left all trails now and, traveling well apart to leave no clear trail, the Indians pushed forward with renewed vigor. They seemed tireless, as indeed they were when upon a war-trail, and it was not till night had drawn down that they halted in a small stream-bed.

Even then the halt was only long enough to allow them to fill the water-bags, for they were too wary to camp near water. Cautious as always, they knew well enough that pursuers would make first of all for watering-places.

They left the stream-bed and camped that night upon a neighboring hill that overlooked the countryside. Mercedes felt, rather than saw, the leader of the Indians untie the rawhide *riata* that bound her feet, and found herself suddenly in a heap upon the ground. The Indians only laughed. A little sage-brush was pulled for her and the man motioned for her to be seated.

No sooner had she done so than her feet were tightly tied again by no gentle hand and a naked knife, flashed before her eyes, warned her of the consequences of an attempt to escape.

She could scarcely swallow the hard pieces of sun-dried meat that were thrown to her, and she was never conscious of having lain down. Somehow the sun seemed to be up the next minute and again she found herself on the red stallion moving forward in a red haze of dust and sweat and tears.

The horse stumbled frequently now, for he had had neither water nor grass for more than forty-eight hours, and he had traveled far and hard.

Two more days passed; such days for the delicately nurtured Spanish girl as even Torquemada could never have devised, so terrible were they in their torment of mind and body.

Was she being carried off as a hostage? She knew better. Indians who lived near Spanish garrisons would have feared to bring down on their tribe the vengeance of their conquerors.

Was it in hope of a ransom being paid? Her reason rejected that, too, for she knew that to claim a ransom the captors must get in touch with the Spaniard and one hint of her plight would set afire such a blaze of anger that no tribe would survive. Already all trace of her must be lost.

Some more hideous reason than that lay behind her capture. Her abductors had made her see that no harm was intended, but these new masters were very different, as she felt when they looked at her. Even self-destruction—and Mercedes realized that it might come to that—seemed impossible. She lacked the means.

Escape? How could she escape and where could she go? It was well-nigh impossible, for each night the men set a guard; each night her feet were carefully secured. Yet—if it were to be tried it must be done at once. She felt angry with herself for not having realized long ago that there was but one means by which her escape could be made possible, and that was the red stallion, and already he was nearly dead of exhaustion.

She knew that if he failed her she would die miserably among these arid mountains, but the dread of worse than death at the hands of her captors made her make up her mind.

THAT night, by instinctive use of the oldest means known of conveying thought—sign language—she made the Indians understand that the red stallion was slowly dying of exhaustion and that he must have feed and water.

They nodded.

She motioned to the water near which they had camped and asked permission to water the stallion in the pool.

Two men accompanied her to the stream-bed and watched her attentively as she determinedly held the eager horse back, giving him only drop by drop at first from the hollow of her hand. A little later she gave him a few small swallows and after two hours let him drink freely, after which she let him graze on the short grass and the succulent beans of the mesquite bushes.

The Indians looked on with surprize. Apparently it had never occurred to them that the horse needed either food or water—as the Indian of today looks upon his horse as a machine to go for days with no care, so did they four hundred years ago.

When Mercedes had taken him back to camp she carefully rubbed him down with a handful of grass and set about arranging her own bed. The attempt to escape must be made that night if it were to succeed at all.

When the man came with the *riata* to tie her feet as usual, she motioned to the horse, making the man understand that he must be watered and fed again. The man looked his surprize. In answer she showed him that the horse was very tired and that he must be fed several times during the night and that she must not be tied till she had fed and watered him.

He nodded comprehendingly, picked up his bow and followed her as she untied the horse and led him toward the stream.

There was just one point along that stream from which an attempt could be successful, but her first difficulty would be in very quickly mounting the horse.

A rocky point of ground overhung a deep pool where the bank was waist high. Standing on the bank, she could let the horse enter the pool below her to drink and then she could get into saddle by simply jumping from the bank. But first she must get rid of the Indian sentry who would be with her.

Trembling with nervousness that she could scarcely conceal, she walked slowly along by the horse's head, talking to him as she went.

"If you have brains and heart you will need them this night, Aldama. Bear me well this night and you shall have a golden manger and a silver trough! Oh, Aldama, do not fail me! Bear me tonight as you have borne a mailed knight

and your name will live in story—so! Gently into the water now, good horse!"

She moved along the high bank above him, while the stallion at the full length of the rope moved gingerly among the stones beneath her, delicately nuzzling pool after pool, always moving upstream as horses do, till he was immediately below her.

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw her guard standing within arm's-reach on the very edge of the bank where it was five feet high, leaning on his bow.

Bending as if to tie her shoe, she handed the man the end of the rope. Instinctively he took it, as people will take anything that is handed them, and in that moment, rising to her full height, Mercedes threw her whole weight upon him.

With a startled shout, he shot over the edge of the steep bank and fell upon his face among the boulders of the creek bed, every vestige of breath knocked out of him, sick and bruised with the heavy fall.

Before the shout had died away, Mercedes, gathering up the slack of the rope, ran to the edge of the bank above the startled horse, slipped into the saddle that for four days now had never been displaced, pulled up his head and raced him up the rocky stream-bed at a breakneck gallop.

Around the point of rocks they went and then up and out of the arroyo, heading for the low hills to the north. In and out through the brush crashed the startled horse, heading always northward to top the ridge, while behind them shrill yells and shouts told Mercedes that the camp of her enemies was thoroughly alarmed.

VI

SPEED was now her main dependence. She knew that she must circle that camp and head south again, but she did not know that once she had circled the camp she could trust the red stallion to take her unerringly into the Spanish lines. If she had known that she would have been spared much.

The instinct of one pursued is to run always at full speed; the fact that the pursuer is but human and can not pursue at top speed is lost sight of. By consequence, the girl, urging her too willing mount with heel and rein, fled for hour after hour at top speed across mesas that spread out like sheeted silver in the misty moonlight, up and down arroyos, now scrambling down some declivity that would have been impossible by day, scratching hands and face in the thorny mesquite, again clambering wildly up some steep slope slippery with falling shale.

It had been almost dark when she got away. In an hour night had fallen, and she plunged on through the blackness. Occasionally she drew down to a walk to breathe her horse and to listen to the voices of the night. Coyotes, wailing like lost souls in the distance, a weird, eerie yelping that heard from the safety point of Spanish walls had meant no more than the yelping of dogs, took on imaginary dangers when heard among these cold northern mountains.

Once a coughing rumble sounded near her. She did not know it for what it was, a bear disturbed in his search for roots, but she fled on instinct. Later, toward daylight, as the great circle of the moon swung clear of the ruck of clouds that filled a notch in the eastern mountains, she saw a wonderful sight, for there against the silver disk as hard as iron in outline she saw a great mountain lion, one foot on a deer that it had killed, its tail moving slowly from side to side as it eyed the frightened intruder on its mountain lair.

Mercedes flogged the tired horse into a trot—it could do no more—and turned into the first arroyo that she came to.

By now she had lost all sense of direction. It is no easy task for the trained plainsman, set down in a new country, to find his way unerringly. She did not even know the general trend of the mountain ranges that hemmed her in. All that she knew was that her own land lay, or had lain when she started, somewhere off to the south, behind her, but now she had turned so often and fled so rapidly that she had lost even the vague sense of direction that she had had when she started. When the sun came up it seemed to the startled girl to be rising in the west.

When a person finds that he is lost, he

almost invariably works by one rule. First comes the desire to run, run and to keep on running no matter what the direction is. Then comes a vague feeling that all is not right, that everything is unreal and that one is moving in a dream. The breath comes short and thick, the heart works overtime. It is fright of the most pronounced type. A little later this too passes.

With Mercedes it lasted long. All day long she urged her jaded horse, for she had not yet experienced that most awful feeling that sooner or later comes to the lost; the feeling that he has taken the wrong direction, when the question is asked—

"Am I on the right road?"

So far, any direction was right for her so long as it led away from the group of Indians who had captured her.

She spent the first night crouched under a bush, the end of the halter in her hand. She dared not tie the horse for fear he should break loose and leave her alone in that fearful wilderness. When daylight came, she found herself near a tiny spring that broke from the hillside, that was bare except for occasional clumps of *ocatilla* in full bloom, and two twisted aspen saplings that stood above the spring.

She gathered a little of the wire-like bunch grass to give to the horse and got a handful of mesquite beans for herself. The bitter taste made her lips pucker, but she had nothing else except a few buds from the prickly-pears that grew in the valley. The horse sniffed at the grass, dropped his nose and turned away. It was the last sign, if she had but known it. The red stallion could tell her no more plainly than that, but she could not read the sign.

Again she mounted and pushed on, and all day long she rode. Unknowingly she had again turned to the north and was heading for that bleak, inhospitable barrier of arid land that forms the northern belt between Mexico and what is now Arizona. Hundreds of miles wide, it stretches from gulf to gulf. The Indians and coyotes alone know the waterholes and the trails, and only they can traverse it with safety.

No longer did she travel over great mesas sloping down to kindly creek bottoms filled with green cottonwood trees, heralding water; no more wide plains covered with bunch grass; no more hill-pockets studded with bean-bearing mesquite that would forage her horse. This land that stretched out at her feet spread out in low-lying levels of red earth, from which the hideous *sahuara* cactus thrust its thorny length into the glare; on which the unsightly prickly-pear and the formidable looking Spanish bayonet were the only green spots on the earth.

Far to the north a great range of saw-toothed, jagged red hills stood up against the turquoise sky. She felt that she must get across those hills as soon as might be, for behind them must be the Spanish settlements with their hope of safety.

"Come, Aldama." She started at the sound of her own voice. "One more effort, good horse! Almost the last——"

A great sob rose and almost choked her. She was thirsty and reached for the water-bag that hung on the saddle.

It was gone!

Somewhere on the trail, during that hurried ride over hill and dale, the rawhide thong by which it hung had been snapped, and the bag had dropped unheeded. There remained on the saddle but a foot of twisted thong.

Her heart sank for a moment but she felt sure that she would again find water. They had never yet made an entirely dry camp. On and on she went, the red horse sinking fetlock deep in the soft sand, his nose at times almost on the blisteringly hot earth.

Mercedes, inert in the saddle, swaying to and fro, nearly overcome with the intense heat of the desert, pitched forward and back with every step, till finally Aldama, his foot turning on a stone, fell sidewise to earth with a little grunt and lay still upon the sand.

Mercedes, flung far to the right, scrambled to her feet and ran to him, raising his head.

"Oh, no, no! Aldama! It must not be!" She burst into a fit of sobbing. "I will not have it so! It shall not be!"

But it was! Even as she spoke, a gray film passed across the horse's eyes, like smoke across glass. He raised his head shudderingly and gasped twice, dropped it again and so died.

Immediately, out of the hot blue sky above her, a buzzard dropped like a plummet, followed by another and another.

OVERCOME, Mercedes sat by the body of the horse, for hour after hour, in the blazing sun of the long afternoon. Her mind refused to act. She could not realize as yet what had happened, nor the magnitude of her loss, for as yet she simply felt that a personal friend had gone. The red stallion had been the one link that still bound her to civilization and now that link was snapped.

"I must die here in the desert!"

The thought lent terrors to her; sharp, poignant terrors that tore at her heart-strings. Then a great wave of resistance swelled and swelled.

"No! God is good and the saints are kind. This is sent merely to try me. I will go on."

Again she rose and moved off, more slowly now, toward that raw line of hills. But the desert heat, baking brain and blood and tissue, making the staring eyeballs ache with the stabbing pain of the white-hot rays that pierced like knife-blades, drove her to the shelter of a giant cactus. There was both food and water there if she had but known it. She did not know it and paid for her ignorance with physical suffering.

Hour after hour passed, and when the cool of the evening twilight came, she moved on again. Her throat ached with thirst and her lips were cracked with the fierce reflected heat from the sand floor so that she could scarcely swallow. All that night she stumbled ahead in a trance, stopping from time to time to rest a while, and then on again till the sun, up-rushing from the plain, found her at the very foot of the hills that she had sought.

Grim and forbidding they were, rising almost sheer from the plain. Look as carefully as she might, she could see no pass across those mountains, and without a pass she felt certain that she could never hope to cross that craggy range. Even if she should pass them, where was home? Was she on the right path?

All the terrors that she had felt during the previous nights of travel crowded in upon her and oppressed her as she slowly turned eastward and went along the base of that formidable looking range, seeking some easy slope by which she could reach the summit, for she felt very sure that once there she could see some sign of the land she sought. Even a smoke would be a sign of promise.

Mile after mile she plodded painfully along.

Perhaps that spot of white that she saw far up upon the hill to her left front was something full of promise! She looked again at it and watched it as she walked.

It was a very small spot of white, perhaps a white rock upon the brown hillside, but—as she watched it, it moved a little.

Her heart almost missed a beat.

She moved again, keeping her eyes constantly fixed upon that little spot. Again it moved.

"What can it be?" she asked the question aloud.

The Indians had no horses or cows, but it might perhaps be a sheep or a mountain goat.

Suddenly the thing disappeared and her heart dropped with it. Then it came up again. Staring with her soul in her gaze, she suddenly realized that it had bent over and raised itself again and that —it was a man.

There is only one white object that bends over and raises itself up and that is—man.

Beyond all doubt it was a man and in white clothing! Then, her sight quickened by the joy of her discovery, she picked out on the hillside two smaller figures clinging to the face of the slope but higher up the hill. Clearly they were men at work of some kind on the mountain.

She tried to call out to them, but invisible fingers seemed to close upon her throat and she gasped painfully with shortened breath as she ran forward.

A breath of coolness passed across the face of the desert; a slight cloud as of smoke blew athwart the sun. She never noticed it, but kept walking and waving her hand from time to time.

A wind rose in the southwest and, gaining strength as it came, whirled across the flat plain that was almost red-

hot with the sun. In such places are whirlwinds born, and in the moment's space that Mercedes was running along the hill one came quickly into being; such a whirlwind as is only to be found in the dry lands of the Southwest; a wind like a tornado, with the sun shining above and beyond it and little heat-devils kicking up dust-clouds in its wake.

The dark wind-cloud lowered more and more. There was a great gap in its center through which a single ray of sunlight streamed, as light comes through a hole in a blanket. Lower and lower fell the cloud; colder and colder came the wind.

Suddenly it began to gyrate, drawing up and into it all the light substances that were in its path—bits of stick and brush, clumps of tumbleweed and dry grass—and still it turned and twisted, the dark cloud above it, the smoking earth beneath that seemed united by that single twisting funnel of dust and wind and storm, and through it all came that single ray of golden sunlight streaming down from the rent in the black cloud above.

Intent upon her discovery, Mercedes never heeded what was behind her. She ran and ran, but the whirling tornado behind her came yet faster. A few bits of stinging gravel warned her, and she flung a startled glance over her shoulder to see the threatening column of dust and storm about to break full upon her. She had just time to fling herself flat upon her face in the sand with a choking cry.

It may have been that startled wind-borne cry that reached the cliff-face or it may have been pure luck, but something made the white figure straighten up.

THE man came to the edge of the little cutting on the hill-face in which he stood and, seeing the dark swirling column below him, gave a loud whistle. Instantly two other figures above him on the rock-face clambered down to him and stood staring as he pointed.

Slowly, very slowly, the storm passed down the valley, caught in its own eddy from the hillside, and swung to the east along the range, eddying and bellying in the low ground. The dust column checked and swirled as it veered to the right. And there, at the foot of the cliff, stretched out at full length, lay the figure of a woman, inert and motionless, her arms flung wide, her golden hair streaming across her face and on the red earth.

The man above her gave a quick exclamation. His companions noted the quick jerk of his hand. Instantly they clambered down the steep slope, one of them pausing long enough to pick up a water-bag, and went at a run to the place where Mercedes lay.

The girl moved a little and the men stopped suddenly as if petrified.

Very slowly she raised herself. Even more slowly her hands went to her head, gathering up the masses of her sun-burned golden hair that flowed to her waist. Then her eyes met the eyes of the man, and she drew herself up to her full height in time to see him throw himself face down upon the sand, his hands outstretched and twitching, his whole body quivering in an ecstasy of fear.

"Ari-zuna!" he called quaveringly. "Ari-zuna!"

Ari-zuna was the sun goddess of the elder peoples.

VII

WONDERINGLY Mercedes gazed at them for a little space. Then, seeing the water-bag, she picked it up and drank a little. She had enough self-restraint to keep from drinking deeply at first. When she lowered the bag, the men were staring at her.

The leader raised himself to his knees very cautiously and worked his way forward, inch by inch, till he was close enough to the girl to touch her gown. He seized its hem and raised it to his lips.

"Ari-zuna," he said again, pointing to the sky, from which the single pencil of golden sunlight still streamed upon her.

She nodded comprehendingly and made the sign of the cross.

The men sprang to their feet with exclamations of pleasure, repeating the sign and adding to it others of their own. Puzzled and perplexed she watched them, till one of them, taking a little stick, drew a cross in the dust, and added

to it certain other lines, till he had made what is now known as the swastika, the oldest form of the cross known among the Indians.

Presently she signed for food. No sooner was she understood than one of the men ran back up the hill and came back presently with a little bundle of flat cakes made of coarse maize flour. They were the *tortillas* that she knew so well, and along with them there were certain round, small slices of white meat that she ate without question, finding them delicious. Later she was to find out more about that meat.

She tried to talk to them in Spanish, but they knew no word of it. The dialects of Anahuac that she had learned from Maria were equally unintelligible to her new friends. The only way she could make herself understood was by such simple signs that she could make and they could understand.

They showed her plainly enough that she was to go with them, but they carefully refrained from touching her in any way as they led her up the hill to the spot where they had been working. There a small tent made of leather stood on a little level spot. This she was shown was hers, and the leader made signs by passing his hands from right to left and by pointing to the sun and counting, that when she had rested they would go to their own place.

For a moment her brave heart sank as she realized that her wanderings were not yet over. Even her most sanguine hope could not make her now believe that these new friends would take her to a place where she could be in touch with her own people. At least they were friendly and that was much, but what the end of it all would be she could not even guess. The demeanor of the men assured her that only good was intended, so she entered the little hot tent and with a short prayer to the Virgin who had thus far befriended her she threw herself upon the little heap of skins and clothing and sank into the dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion.

Day came all too soon, and with it a meal such as she had not eaten for many a day. Red fruit of the prickly-pear was there, stripped of its fairy thorns, and beans cooked in an earthen pot with *tortillas* and water that tasted all too plainly of the goat-skin bag.

The meal over, the men packed up their few belongings and Mercedes was given to understand that they were to start for some place beyond the range of mountains. Ten days' travel they told her by the simple signs of pointing to the sun and holding up ten fingers. Then came a wonderful thing, for one of them very patiently piled pebbles around four sides of a small rectangle and, pointing to his companions, laughed pleasantly.

It was clearly indicated that they lived in a city that was walled with stone walls, ten days away across the hills. She knew it could not be a Spanish city, for they treated her with a veneration that had been shown no Spaniard since Cortez had landed twenty-five years before in Anahuac. What place could it be? Suddenly the purpose of Coronado's quest occurred to her. Cibola! Could it be that they came from Cibola?

They knew the sign of the cross and venerated it, and the people of Cibola were supposed to be Christians!

She did not know that the swastika that the men had made for her was simply a perverted symbol of old-time phallic worship common to all primeval peoples. Could it be that she was about to stumble by accident on the great adventure that had set on foot the greatest expedition that the New World had yet seen?

She asked the question by pointing to the heap of pebbles and saying—

"Cibola?"

The man shook his head as he replied — "Acoma."

Then, pointing to the northwest, he said—

"Hawikuh."

"Cibola," the girl repeated energetically. A sudden gleam of understanding lit the man's eyes and he opened a skin bag that he carried about his neck and poured from it a little heap of small yellow nuggets of gold and a handful of gold-dust.

"Siboyla," he said quite clearly and pointed toward the southwest.

Mercedes was puzzled. The man was evidently trying to tell her that there were several walled cities, from one of which, named Siboyla, the gold was ob-

tained. While she was still puzzling over the problem, the men swung their packs and started off on the new trail.

All day long they traveled easily over the hills, coming out at last upon a new country. Even Mercedes' untrained eye could see that it was far different. They first crossed a broad plain that took them two days of steady travel. Then they entered a broad river valley, filled with a dense growth of cottonwoods and aspens that overhung the water that was matted with water-cress and great lilies.

In no place deep, the clear water rippled over golden gravel and from time to time small sluice-boxes set along the edge of the stream showed the opening to irrigating ditches that led to newly dug-up fields that a month later would be heavy with maize and beans, pumpkins and small fruits.

There were no houses. This fact became more and more apparent as they passed along the trail. The third day one of the men, seeing her curious look as they passed a field, smiled and pointed to a jutting point of hill that thrust out into the valley along which they were marching. Far above them, on the highest peak, a column of smoke rose high in air. Following his pointing finger, her gaze lit upon a small walled building on the crest, where she could see several people moving in and out.

So this was where and how they lived! Inexpert though she was in drawing conclusions, she knew at once that only fear could make a people thus fortify themselves in inaccessible places. Dread of raiders! Was she never to get away from force and the strong hand? Her heart sank again! Would she ever reach her own people? Or was she foredoomed to spend her life among these savage peoples?

THE men were quick to note her changing moods and eager to divert her. More than once on the march they had gone out of their way to pick for her a rare flower, to pick up a bit of glittering mineral that had caught her eye.

During the long hours on the trail and in the camps, Mercedes made every effort to learn what she could of their language. It was by no means difficult, and in the ten days of their travel she learned many words, so that she had little difficulty in carrying on a halting conversation on simple subjects.

Always keeping to the valleys they had unlimited water, and game was picked up daily; now and then a deer, quail out of every cactus clump, or wild ducks from the pools, and rabbits till she hated the sight of one. At the end of the second week they came up out of the valley and topped a neighboring ridge that overlooked a broad, flat plain.

The astonished Mercedes saw the men throw themselves upon their knees, facing to the east. She looked her question and one of the men, rising, pointed to a faint blue blur upon the far horizon.

"Acoma is over there," he said. "And over there they wait our coming. See! Already Hualpai is far along the trail. Let us hasten."

He pointed to the base of the hill and Mercedes, following his gesture, saw one of her party running at speed toward the blue blur in the offing that the man had said was Acoma.

It took them seven hours of steady marching to cross that plain to the blue peak that resolved itself into a rocky pinnacle that stood alone upon the plain. Blue when seen on the horizon, it changed to red and brown and purple in the changing light, and on its top was undoubtedly a walled city that frowned upon the neighboring lowlands.

Closer they drew and closer, till they were within a half-mile of that barren pinnacle that rose sheer from a belt of cultivated land, through which ran a little fringe of green cottonwoods.

Suddenly there came to her ears a discordant note, the long, braying roar of an earthenware trumpet; then raucous yells and shouts and the gates of the *fortalice* above them swung open, and from them streamed forth a great crowd, jostling and crowding into and along the narrow foot-path that wound down the slope to the plain beneath.

Presently the throng divided and stood lining the foot-trail, men and women taking opposite sides, so that Mercedes and her escort passed through a living lane. As they entered that lane she was astounded to see the people, as by one accord, throw themselves prostrate in the path, face down upon that rocky trail,

while from all the throng a low whisper went up.

Only one word they said; the same word that her escort had voiced when they had first discovered her prostrate figure prone in the sunlight in the track of the tornado.

"Ari-zuna," they whispered, "Ari-zuna," and strained back from her as poplars strain in a tempest.

Mercedes halted as three men came slowly down the path toward her. They were old men and their white hair, cut square across the line of the shoulders, was plastered with red clay in which was mingled threads, carrying little nuggets of gold and small turquoises set in copper. About their necks hung strings of snake-bladders filled with small stones that rattled as they walked, and in their hands they carried little whips made of colored leather. Their only dress was a kilt made of leather strips, on which was painted in red ocher the figure of a coyote and in each corner a coiled snake.

They chanted a low song as they came, and shook their sacred whips excitedly, but in a grave and serious manner. When they reached her, they too sank upon their knees and, taking from their kilts little earthen whistles, they blew shrilly upon them, threw themselves face down in the dust and so waited.

A great silence fell. When it had become almost insupportable, the oldest of the priests spoke. By listening very carefully, Mercedes made out his words:

"Will Ari-zuna deign to tell her servants why she has come to visit them? The trail from the Sunland is long and hot and Ari-zuna's feet are very tender. Does she bring good or evil news for her servants?"

Like a flash it came to her! These people took her for one of their heathen gods. Her white skin, her golden hair, the manner of her finding—all these were miraculous to them. She remembered that word Ari-zuna that had been uttered when she was first found in the desert.

She remembered all the instances when great deference and respect had been paid her. Who would not be civil to a god? Like a shock it came to her. She could not accept this position in which Fate had placed her, yet to refuse might mean death—or worse; to accept it would be very close to sacrilege.

For answer she smiled and, raising her hands to her head, released suddenly the flood of her golden hair, allowing it to fall upon her shoulders, where it lay a great mass of golden glory. The crowd gasped as she very slowly made her reply.

"I have come from a strange and distant land. It was very hot there and I sought coolness."

"Among thine own people, Ari-zuna!" broke in an excited priest. "The gods know! We have kept thy temple as in the days of the Chichemecs. Not a stone has been changed since the day when Tula first laid our walls. See! The sacred whips are still used, and each year the sacred runners go east and west and south and north to the Yellow Line to gather the earth-runners for the rites, as it has been from the beginning. Thy house has been set in order, and the four maids wait with the sacred salt and grain."

Bowing deeply, he backed away from her and up the rocky trail. Mercedes followed him slowly and the crowd drew after her as leaves are drawn by the wind.

UP, up, up they went to the city walls that stood sheer upon the top of the rocky pencil. No street was level, but all rose in tier on tier. The houses that lined those streets were built of rock laid in mortar and were plastered with stucco that had been newly coated with fresh lime so that the walls showed in the tropic glare as if they were covered with sheeted silver.

Rank above rank they rose to the crowning ridge where the temple stood. The summit of the hill had been cut away to make room for it. It stood, four-square, on the very crown of the ridge. The only entrance was by a single door about eight feet above the narrow path, from which a narrow ladder led to the entrance.

Just now the door was open and the ladder in place, and from the temple came the sound of female voices singing.

Mercedes walked up the narrow path, and, with all the dignity that she could

muster, climbed the ladder to find herself on the threshold of a great courtyard that was filled with a throng of eager, expectant women. The moment she set foot across the entrance they set up a chant and opened out, leaving a lane along which she passed. One young woman dressed in white, backing slowly away from her, scattered dried maize blades before her as she came along with handfuls of golden grain.

Back she went till she reached the open door of a large room, where she stepped aside. The chant ended as Mercedes entered the building and found herself in the cool, darkened interior of an Indian temple.

It was simple enough. A great square room into which a little light came through windows barred with wood that opened high in the thick walls. In the end of the room facing the door was a raised platform of adobe brick, on one end of which an altar had been raised.

The altar was painted white and bore the red figure of a coyote and a snake. Two earthen jars upon the dais contained salt and corn meal, and a little bowl of curiously spiced drink stood before the altar. Before the bowl, a small fire of some aromatic wood flickered fitfully, filling all the room with a smell as of incense.

While she stood wondering, aghast at what had befallen her, two bare-footed Indian girls, dressed in white, entered the room. They carried baskets of fine, tightly woven grass that were filled with water, a pile of white clothing and a platter heaped with small hot cakes of finest corn meal and small round pieces of white meat delicately cooked.

Very deferentially they poured water upon her hands and one of them, pulling forward a small, hide-covered stool, motioned her to sit, and took from her tired feet her well-worn sandals. Another poured cool water on her feet and dried them with a cotton cloth. Mercedes looked at her and almost wept.

The kindness and tenderness of these savages had won the heart of the proud Spanish girl, who, for the moment, forgot that they were showing her the respect due a goddess.

"I am very tired," she said presently. "I would like to sleep."

Instantly one of the girls went to a recess in the walls and drew forward a small bed-frame that was strung with strips of rawhide. Over this she threw a gray blanket.

"Sleep!" she said. "While Ari-zuna sleeps there shall be silence."

At her shrill call from the doorway, the singing in the courtyard ceased, and the tired Mercedes stretched herself at full length upon the bed. For a while she wept quietly, the hot, burning tears streaming down her cheeks, but the exhausted body could not long resist and presently, after a fervent prayer to the God of her Fathers Who alone could help her in her extremity, she gave a little tired sigh and was presently fast asleep.

In this manner did Ari-zuna come to Acoma.

VIII

XICOTL and Andres had no difficulty in picking up the trail at the scene of the fight. The arrows sticking in the ground gave the direction from which they had been shot; the grass was plainly trampled and there was a little pool of blood upon the hard ground.

A few dark drops scattered along the path told them that one of the attacking party at least was wounded. Xicotl got the general direction, noted the sun sinking low and turned to Andres.

"The sun will be down in a half-hour, *señor*. After dark we can not follow the trail. Shall we take a great risk thus early in the pursuit?"

"What risk?"

"They are but human. They must have water; especially for their wounded man. We know the general direction they have taken and I know where the nearest water-hole is. To follow the trail we must wait for dawn. If we strike for the water-hole we may miss them—if they have gone by another route. I know where the northern trail crosses the river bed."

"You know the country?"

"For a few days travel only, *señor*. After that—no—! Shall we take the chance?"

"Yes. And hasten, Xicotl."

There was no need to tell Xicotl to hasten. He laid his water-bag across the saddle of the horse, shortened his grip on his *macahuitl* and swung up the hill at a long, loping wolf's trot that ate up the miles. Behind him Andres strode swiftly, his long bow across his shoulders, leading the horse. Behind him toiled Fray Marco, his cassock trussed up about his waist, in his hands an ax.

Mile after mile they put behind them, crossing lines of grassy swales that stretched away, a gray plain under the rising moon. The first flush of the desert sun found them in the valley where Mercedes' captors had halted for water. Andres began casting about the creek-bank for signs of a fire.

"No need to look there, *señor*. The northern men use no fires when on a war trail. If they got water here it was to take it to their camp farther away. If they camped, it was on high ground, from which they could watch the high land behind them. Try the grass on the hill-tops."

"How do you know that they will have crossed the creek here?"

"Flying men run straight. These men have raided into a hostile country. They are returning swiftly to their own land. They will run straight. They have crossed here—Ah! Here it is, *señor!* You see I was right!"

It was no more than a patch of trampled grass on a high knoll, the place where Mercedes had spent the first night in the hands of her savage captors, but it gave the direction.

"Now we can pick up the trail at dawn. The next water is two days distant. It is but a small pool which many ducks use."

All day the second day they traveled as rapidly as they could, but it was late on the third day when they came to the pool. Still there were no ashes to show that the pursued had rested and, but for Xicotl, the search would have ended there.

"The horse must have trampled the edge," said the puzzled Andres, hunting for hoof-marks in the soft earth.

"They have probably never seen a horse, *señor*, and know not that he must have feed and water or, having captured him, they do not care if he dies. Let us search farther back—Alli! Here it is, *señores!*"

They ran to him and saw a little heap of dried brown substance—no more!

"A mouthful of dried meat that some one has spit out! Man does not waste food without a reason! Let me look further—Ah! Here!"

He picked from the trampled edge of the pond the fresh skin of a rabbit which one of the pursued had killed and eaten.

"Most men make mistakes at times. They should have eaten the skin too! As I live, *señor,* here is the hoof-mark of the red stallion again."

From that point on for four days the trail was easy to follow across the sandy plain, where the hoof-marks showed clear and distinct. Then they lost it, and for five days tracked the hoof-marks only to find that the horse had been ridden out on one trail then back on the same tracks and had joined the main party again. This caused them to lose five days of straight travel.

Time and again on hard ground they lost the trail entirely and had to patiently "cut trail" as it is now called.

It means holding on the last place where the tracks were seen and describing a circumference about that point, then carefully examining every inch of that circumference to see where the tracks cross it. It is not easy. Any one but an Indian would have become discouraged. Xicotl kept at it with the pertinacity of a blood-hound and Andres, his skill and experience here of no value, watched him moodily as he cast about for a "sign."

During all those heart-breaking delays, only Fray Marco remained placid, but it was Fray Marco who carefully watched the water-bags, who mended the worn sandals, who cooked the scanty food when the tired men had flung themselves panting to the ground for rest.

"Patience, my friends, patience!" he would say. "God is very good and the saints are kind. Sometimes they try our very souls for our own good, but they are always just."

"What justice is there, father, in letting a beautiful Christian lady fall into the hands of heathen savages?"

Andres was nearly frantic, for even Xicotl was at fault. The Indian had

sunk to his haunches in the shadow of a giant cactus.

"Would you cease the search, my son?"

"I?" Andres smiled grimly. "God so do to me, and more also, if I ever quit this trail while grass grows or water runs, till it leads me to the woman I—pshaw! I can not stand chattering here. Is there water in the bag?"

For answer, Fray Marco held the skin upside down. It was as dry as a bone.

"*Bueno!* We must fill it."

There was not a drop of water for forty miles behind them and Fray Marco knew it, so he watched Andres as he took the bag and moved toward a great round cactus plant a few yards off the trail.

They saw him draw his knife and bend over the cactus as if to cut into the juicy head, and then a startled, joyous shout brought them running to him.

Andres stood with dilated eyes, his finger pointing to the cactus, in which a gaping cut showed brown and sunburned. It had been cut with a knife.

"They have cut it for water! Here is sign! See where they have cut the cactus for the juice to fill their water-bags."

Xicotl nodded and sprang forward.

"And here is the stallion again."

He pointed to a hoof-print.

"How long ago did they cut this cactus?"

"Perhaps a week since. See how dry the cut is. We lost at least ten days on them."

"On, then, *compañeros!* We must take it up in the flat land."

DAYS passed, days that seemed a thousand hours long to Andres as he hung impatiently over Xicotl, who painstakingly traced every inch of that broken trail across the hills and the long reaches of the desert.

There were things that helped, too, as when they found the bark gnawed from cottonwoods, showing that the horse had foraged on them, and once a little pile of mesquite beans the tired stallion had left. Whenever their water ran out they replenished it from cactus plants that dotted the waste country.

"Blessed sight! There is water again." Fray Marco pointed to a narrow stream-bed filled with small trees in the distance. "Let us hasten."

The trail was plain now, for the pursued, feeling themselves safe, had become careless. It led direct to the stream-bed, where it lay below a bank. In the grass were unmistakable signs of a camp, ashes, remnants of food and a broken bow.

"Hoof-prints again in the stream! Saints and angels! What a leap that was!"

Andres pointed to the hoof-scars that showed where the startled stallion had leaped forward, when Mercedes had struck him with the *riata* the night she escaped.

In that hurried dash for freedom Mercedes had left a trail that any child could have followed. When Xicotl had traced it for a short distance, he stopped with a smile.

"It is all right now, *señores.* We can follow at a run if we like—I think. We can not miss it any more."

"What do you mean?" Fray Marco and Andres spoke almost simultaneously.

For answer, Xicotl pointed to the hoof-scarred slide where the stallion had slipped down a steep bank.

Many miles farther on he picked up the water-bag that had fallen from Mercedes' saddle. Suddenly he stopped short in his tracks and faced his companions:

"The *señorita* has escaped from the men of the north," he said positively. "She escaped down in the arroyo that we passed. There have been no signs of any Indians with her for twenty miles, and the horse is going so fast that no dismounted man could keep up with him. No! No! *Señores!* The lady has escaped from them. No Indian would have left such a trail."

Fray Marco muttered a blessing and crossed himself. It was Andres who swore aloud.

"Alone then! God of mercies! What can she do alone in this land?"

"My son!" Fray Marco's voice was very stern. "Thus far, though she was in the hands of savages, we have trusted and toiled. Shall we trust less, now that we know she has been taken out of heathen hands and placed in God's strong ones?"

"I am well rebuked. Come on, Xicotl."

And again they moved on into the limitless unknown.

"Is this the country through which you traveled last year?" Andres asked Fray Marco.

The priest had been studying every feature of the land as they passed along it. His face wore the puzzled look of one who is struggling to recall a thing which he has seen and forgotten. He had watched peaks and mesas and valleys as they came to them, striving vainly to remember some salient feature of that terrible trip of his the year before.

He nodded slowly.

"I think it is the same country, but I can not be sure. The general slope of the land is about the same. It is very curious, my son, but my memory is clean of the greater part of what took place. There should be a flat, sandy plain with a range of red hills on the far side. They stand up sheer from the plain and have no foot-hills."

"Is that the sandy plain?" Andres pointed to the limitless expanse of sand over which Mercedes had passed now spreading out at their feet.

"It looks like the plain. Has Xicotl again picked up the trail?"

Xicotl had never lost it, but now he stood tense and rigid as a pointer scenting a bird.

"Something has happened out there, *señor*. Maybe—I cannot tell what it is. It may be a dead antelope."

He pointed to a brown spot on the yellow face of the desert, a few hundred paces away. Andres walked slowly toward it. Presently the two men saw him begin to run; saw him suddenly throw up his hands and fall on his knees by the dark object on the plain.

Xicotl reached him first and found the great scoutmaster, he who as a boy had braved the terrors of the burning lava in Popo's crater, crying like a child, for there at his feet lay the dead body of the red stallion.

"Look now, father! How can we look for more now than to find her own dead body? What have you to say now? Can all your piety or faith support you further?"

"'Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him,'" muttered Fray Marco slowly. But his lips paled, for he knew well enough what the finding of the body of the horse portended.

"How long has the horse been dead?"

"I can not tell, *señor*. As you know, flesh dries up here in this sun and the buzzards have not left a great deal from which to judge. Look how they lie gorged in the bush!"

Xicotl pointed to the bodies of a dozen great brown birds, gorged to repletion from their feast, utterly unable to lift themselves in flight.

"We can follow easily now!" Xicotl was plainly exultant. "See now, Don Andres, we have been on the trail for nearly six weeks, yet we have never lost it entirely. Shall we despair now?"

"A *caballero* of Spain may fail, Xicotl, but he never despairs!" Andres made answer, with that curious mixture of humility and arrogance that set the Spaniard of those days a man apart from other men. It would have seemed boundless conceit in an Englishman. In Andres it seemed not a whit out of place.

"Forward then!"

And again they plodded on in the gathering dusk.

THE two Spaniards could never have traced the girl across those sands, but the lynx-eyed Xicotl hardly wavered. Several times he paused and retraced his tracks a short distance, but he always picked up the trail again and led them unswervingly to the foot of the ridge, where he stood for a while, at fault. Then he turned to the right and, at a slow trot now, led the way along the base of the great range.

"Look, *señores!*" He pointed to a mark across the desert's dusty face, a mark such as a great broom might have made in sweeping. The sand was heaped along a six-foot track. Andres looked his question.

"A tornado has left that—and here—something has happened here! Look!"

The excited Xicotl seized something from the ground and held it out to Andres. Puzzled and utterly bewildered, the astounded Andres turned over in his hand the crumbling end of a stale *tortilla!*

"A *tortilla* and made of finest maize—

and—here shod feet went. Four people, the girl and three Indians—see how they toe-out along the path!"

Xicotl was again upon the trail, now as easily followed as a trodden path. He led them direct from the spot where the men had found Mercedes, to the camp on the hill where the three stood astounded.

"Shod feet and maize *tortillas*—Xicotl, who are these people?"

Xicotl shook his head in utter bewilderment. Fray Marco took the word.

"I am the only living man who has seen," he said impressively. "These are the people I have seen. These are the dwellers in stone houses. They are the clothed people of the north. I know now what has happened. The maiden after her escape got this far north and she has fallen in with some of the very people that I saw last year."

"What people are they then, father?"

"How shall I name them? We call their greatest city Cibola; it lies off, far off to the northwest. There are seven cities, as we know. They are heathen and worship snakes—yes, and idols too, but they are rich beyond all dreams. Their houses are of silver and their spears——"

"Do you know where their city lies?"

"No. What need? Xicotl will lead us to it, but what then?"

"How can I tell? I only know we must get on as soon as we can and that the good horse needs rest."

They camped that night on the ridge and were away with the dawn, and for day after day followed the broad trail along the valley. The signs of civilization stirred Andres to the bottom of his being. What a time Coronado would have if he ever took this road, for in every little *pueblo* that crowned a rocky summit the Spaniard saw proof of the legend of Cibola. Cibola and its golden cities! Cibola and its ancient civilization! Cibola and its gold and, if the saints proved kind, the girl above all, for after all, she was the real reason for this wild venture of theirs.

Where Mercedes had traveled ten days, Andres traveled eight, but they never quite caught up those two days, and they were weeks behind in actual time spent on the trail. The camp-sites were plain enough: ashes of fires, feathers from quail that they had eaten, skins from killed game, all told them unerringly where the party had passed, till finally one day, shortly after dawn, they came out upon the ridge that overlooked a great flat plain.

Down they plunged, intent only on following the tracks that turned again to the northeast. The sun rushed up and flooded the vast sandy plain with its scorching rays like liquid heat. Again and again they paused to rest, for the incessant travel was taking toll of them.

"Look! Hast thou seen that before?"

Fray Marco pointed to the far horizon. It seemed to lift and lift till between the sky and the ring of the red earth a blue line showed. It lifted and vibrated like a harp-string in the heat and swung in the hot wind, and suddenly out of the east they saw a line of rippling surf come to them across the hot sand.

Andres, accustomed only to the grassy pampas of the far south, stood astounded. Xicotl smiled.

"*Fata Morgana,*" said Fray Marco complacently, as if he had arranged it personally.

"It is the sea," said Andres dully. "How can this be? Are we in an enchanted land?"

"Peopled with devils it may be. It is nought but heat. See! It draws closer. Watch the horse! If it were water would he not smell it and give some sign?"

"True!" Andres stood wonderstruck, watching the advance of that wonderful mirage.

Great lines of heavy surf seemed to move rapidly toward them, enveloping the stunted bushes as they came till, when almost within hand's reach, it melted away in the sun in a shimmering line of glittering white sand.

"Look again! There comes another. By ——!" Andres shouted a very solemn oath. "What do you make of that? Is that, too, heat and *Fata Morgana?*"

His quivering finger pointed directly into the eye of the sun, and Xicotl, whose eyes followed the pointing finger, turned, pale-faced and trembling, to the astonished priest. For once, Fray Marco's self-possession deserted him as he too gazed, for there, hanging high in air,

clear and distinct against that turquoise sky, stood out a very perfect image of a walled city, set on a pinnacle of rock in the middle of a vast plain.

"It is a sign. It is a sign." The priest crossed himself and sank to his knees in the sand. "Never shall I doubt again! Once I came here and I fled when they killed Estevanico—now I have come again. And behind us are the lances of Spain. See! Yonder is the city. On that ridge yonder they killed the negro Estevanico! It is Acoma."

"What!" Andres' voice rose to a shout and he seized the fray's arm in a grip that hurt.

"I say it is Acoma; one of the cities of Cibola! See the ridge! It was on that ridge that they killed Estevanico! It was from that ridge that I fled!"

Andres scrutinized the mirage with hungry eyes, noted the walls of stone, the tiering houses inside the place and, last and most important of all for them just then, the patches of irrigated land along the lines of the creek bottom where the people sowed their crops.

"I have prayed for a map," he said. "I have said more than once that we could do little without seeing the place and God has given it to us. I am content. But, father, where are your houses covered with silver? Where are your paved streets——"

"Yonder—yonder. Look at the shining houses! What do you see? Do you not see the walls of sheeted silver shining in the sunlight? Is not the whole thing one vast panorama of wealth and richness, such as man has never seen? Do you not see? Or rather, what do you see?"

The priest's voice rose to a shriek and he pinched Andres' arm till his fingers whitened. Again he asked—

"Tell me, what do you see?"

"I see a city of some half-civilized hill-peoples, whose houses are of stone and mud and coated with lime-wash that shines in the sun. Is this Acoma?"

"It is Acoma," said Fray Marco sullenly.

"Then is Acoma, what you called it a while ago—a *Fata Morgana?* God help Coronado now!"

For a half-hour Andres sat and studied that wonderful mirage till it faded away as the sun sank. Presently he rose and picked up his bow.

"We must make for that line of cottonwood trees that is near the town. We need food. I will camp somewhere in the plain where we will be sheltered from view and raid those fields tonight for food. See, the trail leads straight to that blue blur on the horizon. It is on that hill that we will find the real city whose vision we have seen."

"If there be a city, it is there, *señor,*" said Xicotl. "See now, Don Andres, I told you that we would follow the trail to the very end. This is the end."

"The city is there and we are here, and in that city the *señorita* lies, perhaps a guest, perhaps a prisoner. Behind us three hundred leagues lies New Spain. It is in my mind, my friends, that this quest is only just beginning."

They spent that night marching toward the hill upon the far horizon and, when dawn began to flush the sky, made their dry camp in a little crater in the hot sand some eight miles from the hill.

IX

MERCEDES awoke in a new world Gone were all the horrible recollections of those wretched camps; the terrors that walked with every waking hour. Instead of the hot, terrible hours in the hands of ruthless savages, she now was surrounded by gentle, low-voiced people whose only aim seemed to be to do her bidding.

She knew that she was supposed to be some goddess whose name was Ari-zuna, but it was a week before she discovered that Ari-zuna was supposed to be the sun-goddess of the tribes, and that her service was largely propitiatory. Ari-zuna dwelt in the sun, and it was the heat of the Summer sun that killed their crops. Therefore Ari-zuna, now come among them for the first time, was to be supplicated to send coolness and not heat, for June was drawing on and too much heat would surely kill the crops and cause a famine.

Among all the tribes of the Pueblo Indians, as they were later called by their conquerors, the object of actual worship was the Great Spirit who lived above the

heavens, who sent rain when and how He pleased, in male and female form. The light showers were female; the roaring thunder-storms that occasionally sweep those valleys were male. And in that dry and arid land, where the people depended solely upon agriculture for their lives, who shall say that these gods were not very real ones?

The intermediary between God and man was the earth-runner—the snake—who lived underground, and who knew the secrets of the water-springs. Not any particular kind of snake; any snake was a messenger. They dwelt in pools; they loved cool, damp places; they followed the crevasses, and they alone had access to their gods. For this reason the snake was held to be a celestial messenger.

On the other hand it was the sun that burned their scanty crops. It was the sun that reigned supreme for eleven months out of the year. Therefore, being the stronger, it was the sun that must be placated to abate his fierce rays till the gods should get word, sent by the serpents, to send their male and female storms upon the earth.

It had pleased Ari-zuna, the sun-goddess, to visit her people in person and they must make her stay so pleasant that she would remain among them, for while she was absent from the sun it would shed less heat and so the crops would prosper.

By some strange freak of fortune the weather did actually become cooler about the time of Mercedes' arrival and she got all the credit for it. It was a purely natural process to the Indians. The sun, deprived of its tutelary deity, lost its force. The fact that the usual rainy season—what there was of it—was about due, meant nothing to them. Rains came, and the sun's rays lost much of their force that year because Ari-zuna had come to dwell among her people. It was very simple.

What wonder that, by quaint ceremonies that were old five hundred years before Cortez landed in Anahuac, by incantations, by charms woven by the priests in the recesses of the sacred *kiva* beneath the temple, by spells made by antelope and snake priests, they should seek to detain Ari-zuna among them and should send the sacred snakes to take their pressing messages to their god for water.

This was the reason for the great snake-dance which the Pueblo Indians have each year just before the breaking of the rains. This was the dance for which they began to prepare as soon as Ari-zuna had made her home among them in the apartments of the temple prepared for her.

Below her rooms lay the sacred *kiva,* the real temple, where the priests met in solemn conclave. Entrance was through a square hole in the roof, to which a ladder led. The ladder was hung with three eagle feathers, suspended above the opening, and three small skins hanging from a string. Curiosity drew Mercedes to the room. She was denied nothing and it was taken for granted that she should wander at will through the place.

During the week following her arrival, the men who had rescued her were summoned a dozen times to the *kiva,* where they were questioned and cross-questioned as to the manner of her coming. Once a black stranger had been seen by these men, but a white man never. They always told the same tale: how they had seen her come down from the sky in the midst of a tornado, for they had come to believe that they had actually seen her coming down. The story lost nothing in the telling and they always told it the same way. They had had no training.

That *kiva* was about ten paces long. One-half of it was raised a foot higher than the rest of it, and rough pictures of a coyote were painted in red and yellow ocher on the floor. A square altar, like the one in the upper apartment, stood in one end, and before it in the loose earth were thrust many "thunder sticks" to invoke the aid of the gods.

For night after night after her arrival, Mercedes saw great fires glow on the highest peaks, and every morning men summoned the runners. These runners were men selected for their speed and endurance. It was their duty to gather snakes for the dance so that there would be many messengers to despatch to the gods. Equipped with a leather bag and with a brush made of feathers, each man started at a run and ran on straight

lines, east, north, south and west, toward the yellow line—horizon—capturing all snakes with which he came in contact.

For two full weeks this ceremony was held. At the end of that time there were plenty of messengers on hand. These snakes were placed in the *kiva*—the sacred chamber—free, but watched by Indian men, who herded them upon the dais with little feather brushes, with which they gently smoothed the head of any snake attempting to escape.

At first Mercedes was nearly overcome with instinctive terror at the sight of so many snakes. Gradually this gave place to sufferance, and then to admiration of the gentleness of the Indians. She had not yet seen Indian nature aroused.

Ari-zuna alone of the women was allowed to be present at the ceremony of the washing of the snakes, when each of the priests, forming in a great circle, plunged his hand into a great bag that was filled with twisting, writhing bodies, and dragged out the first that he grasped. These they thrust into a shallow earthen pan filled with water and then threw them violently upon the floor. The snakes promptly crept back upon the dais, where they were again soothed by men with feather brushes.

Last of all came that really terrific moment of dramatic intensity when Mercedes, sitting on the dais attended by one priest, saw the two lines of priests of the antelope and snake clans form in column of two's and move slowly past her to the droning roar of a great snakeskin drum and innumerable rattles that almost drowned the hum of the priests' voices.

On and on they came, moving in perfect time, till they reached the great jar that was alive with its squirming coils of venemous, poisoned death. Each man, as he passed it, thrust both hands into it, pulled out as many snakes as he could hold and, thrusting their squirming bodies into his mouth, moved off still in perfect time to the music.

That ended the mystic dance. At that time Mercedes saw only the horror of it. Later she found out what it really meant and that each snake was an *Hermes*—a messenger between God and man.

SHE was escorted to her room that night by a group of girls and priests. When she had seated herself, the girls formed themselves in a semicircle behind her. The priests sat cross-legged on the floor while the eldest spoke. Attired in his leather kilt and his gaudy feather head-dress, his body streaked with white paint, he was an impressive figure as he rose and with a preliminary stamp of his foot to call the attention of all earth runners underground to the fact that a priest was speaking, he spoke:

"You have seen, O Ari-zuna, that we still keep the faith of our fathers.

"The antelope and the snake dance have been performed before you.

"You have seen our fleet young men gather up the earth-runners to take our prayers to the gods.

"You have seen our maidens grind the sacred meal that they must scatter on our crops.

"While you have remained away from your own place, O Ari-zuna, the sun has been less hot and our crops have not been scorched. We know that you can not stay long with us.

"Before you go, we ask that you will, in person, spread the sacred meal on our grain fields; that the salt be scattered by your own hand. Will you do this for your people?"

Afraid to ask about the ceremony lest she betray her ignorance, Mercedes nodded.

"Yes," she said slowly. "What I can do I will do gladly for the people."

A hum of approval rose from the crowd. When the blessing had been done by just the priests it meant much to them. Now a goddess was to do it *in propria persona*. Fruitful fields were ensured.

"Tomorrow, then, at daylight, while the household fires still burn on the four houses, we will have the sieve of sacred meal brought along with the salt. The maidens will give you this and will show you the fields. As you know, no one can be present with you when you cast the meal. For three days, at dawn and sunset, you must walk around the fields of the temple from left to right, casting the grain over the left shoulder as you go."

Very early in the morning, while it

was yet dark, Mercedes was aroused by her attendants. The four great fires flamed high on the four houses and low music sounded from the temple. On the roof of the main temple, above the great corn reservoir, visible against the first faint flush of the false dawn, a tall priest made his morning orisons. The smell of dawn was in the air.

Mercedes dressed herself carefully in the white clothes brought her by her attendant, let down her golden hair to the never-failing admiration of the girls, took the woven sieve of maize flour and salt and climbed down the ladder that led from the temple. She passed out of the main gate of the city and down the tortuous path that led to the cultivated fields below.

Pausing at the foot of the hill, she looked about her. What a change four months had wrought in her fortunes! Then she had been the petted ward of the great governor of Sonora, whose name was known throughout all New Spain. Now she was a wanderer upon the face of the earth, dependent for her very life upon her ability to maintain the character of a heathen goddess among wild peoples. To be sure they were kindly and hospitable so far, so long as they believed her to be what they insisted she was, a tutelary deity, but what would they be when they should find out that she was a mere mortal like themselves?

Where was Spain? Off to the south surely, and her eyes sought thirstily the dim blue line of the southern mountains now beginning to loom big in the dawn. Would she ever see again the green places of the south—the grassy courtyards of Culiacan? The flowers would be in bloom there now.

Well, she must do what she had come for. She must go through with a heathen rite of blessing the fields. So, like Demeter of the Baskets, she passed along the furrows, scattering the sacred grain from her sieve. Corn and beans and a dozen plants that she did not know stretched away in row on row beside her, from her feet to that shimmering, dark line a half-mile away, the line of the water-course that was filled with cottonwoods, all calling to a mute heaven for rain, the panacea of this stricken land.

She flung abroad a handful of the meal and passed on down the edge of the field. Foot by foot she moved slowly toward the creek. Suddenly a dark object bulked big before her and she stopped in her tracks. The priests had told her that no one would be permitted abroad at this hour!

She halted in her tracks, a veritable picture, the right hand holding the sieve close to her breast, her left hand on her scarcely beating heart, her golden hair enveloping her as a garment.

"What was that?"

There, striding toward her out of the gray-blue mist of the dawn, came, not the Indian herdsman she had thought to see, but a very ragged and unkempt man. His clothing was of soft leather; three feet of blue steel tapped his leg as he walked; a brown steel cap rested upon his head and in his eyes a light like none that ever showed on earth. Thus came the man that she had seen so often in her dreams—Andres de Avilez.

HE stopped as if thunder-struck. The next moment he broke into a run and flung himself on his knees at her feet and was covering her hands with kisses. She stood trembling.

"God in heaven!" she whispered through pale lips. "Can this be? Now let me not awaken."

"No need to fear the waking now, *señorita!*" Andres sprang to his feet. "I can face the world in arms now."

And he meant it.

"But how? How? How? Oh, tell me quickly lest my reason fail."

She leaned against him and burst into tears.

"Tell me quickly," she said again, "before the sun comes up. They must not see you from the city." She explained quickly.

"But you? How came you here?"

"Come down by the line of the cottonwoods where none can see, and I will explain." And she followed him down into the dry *arroyo,* her heart buoyant and happy, her face aglow.

"Now sit, *señorita.* I must leave you before the people leave the city for the fields. You want our story. Well, then, when the fiscal was killed—"

Mercedes started back from him.

"What do you say? Fonseca killed? By whom? Is this true?"

"As true as gospel."

"Who killed him, and how and where?"

"On the night after the tax-gathering," said Andres, grimly. "They found him with my cloak about his head and your dagger between his shoulders."

Mercedes looked at him with the stony glance of total incomprehension.

"They accused me, of course. Then they looked for you. But you had disappeared. What became of you?"

"I—do—not—know—oh, you must believe me, Don Andres. I have no recollection of anything that took place that night after I went to bed till I waked on the plains under a skin tent in the hands of our Indians."

Andres looked at her astounded.

"They accused me," he said again.

"I see. Then when you were cleared and I was absent they of course blamed me for it—I—God in heaven!"

She clutched her temples and stepped back from him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It can not be—and yet——"

Her voice grew tense with fear and her grip on Andres' arm tightened till it hurt.

"What?"

"I do not remember anything that took place from the moment I went to my room till I woke as from a hideous dream and found myself a prisoner in the hands of the savages. If I am accused of this murder, who will believe my story? And is it not possible that in that time when I do not remember what I did, that——"

"Having first taken my cloak," said Andres coolly—"no, no! It lies deeper than that. Let me get on with the story. We can settle all that later. Well, then, the fiscal, thank God, being dead, Coronado left Culiacan and we with him. We saw by the trail where your fight took place and I found your glove. Coronado went on with the main body but detached a small party to follow you and rescue you. So we followed your trail and here we are."

"Followed the trail? How could you?"

"The saints were kind and you left a good trail—in places. We came out in sight of the city yesterday and wondered how we could get word with you when God sent you here. I left Xicotl and Fray Marco out yonder on the plain while I came in to steal some forage for the horse. I took off my shoes so that none could track me to our place. I felt sure you were in the town, but I knew not how to reach you."

He kissed her hand again, unrebuked.

"How came you here this morning?" he asked in turn.

She told him.

"Can you leave the city again this evening—after dark?" he asked.

"Yes. I will have to do so."

"Then listen! I will get back to the party as rapidly as I can. We will gather what food we can and fill the water-bags, and rest and feed the horse all day. The others will stay where they are now, in the sand crater eight miles out on the plain. When you come out tonight at sundown I will be at this very spot. Try to bring a little salt and flour with you, for we are like to need it. You must be very careful. These are the people who killed the negro Estevanico, the man who accompanied Fray Marco."

"But," she said, puzzled, "Fray Marco went to Cibola. This is ——"

"Acoma, one of the Seven Cities of Cibola or Fray Marco is a liar—and I have my doubts. No, no. Fray Marco did not mean to lie, but he saw the place in a vision, and that vision grew like an air plant—on nothing. I must go now! Look how the day comes on the desert. Remember, this very place at sunset."

She stood still and watched his tall figure fade away among the shadows; then she turned, took up her empty sieve and went back to the city.

X

THAT eight miles of sandy desert trail was like a pleasure jaunt to the happy Andres. Ever since the trailers had topped that distant ridge of hills looking toward the city, he had cudgeled his brain to find some sensible method of procedure.

He was sure the girl was in the town,

but how could he get word to her? That was settled now and there remained but the insignificant task of carrying off the girl from the midst of the people and of traversing some nine hundred miles of dry, arid country with a woman, a tired horse and a half-demented priest—for he had begun to look thus upon Fray Marco. Except for these small details, the problem presented no difficulties.

Fray Marco and Xicotl were in the crater where he had left them. In the little sandy pocket where they lay, a tiny spring oozed from the shale of the hillside. The horse had trampled it into a small quagmire, but the water was still drinkable. The scanty cactus growth and prickly-pears gave also a few mouthfuls of food. It was to eke out the scanty food supply that Andres had raided the grain fields. He had gone bare-footed so that the prints of his southern-made moccasins should not betray him.

He came down that sandy slope in two great leaps and struck Fray Marco a resounding blow between the shoulders.

"It is all arranged, my good fray. It is all arranged, I say. I have seen her."

"Holy Virgin!" The good fray started up.

"No! Not that but another—Mercedes! The Señorita de Acasta! I have seen her, I say."

Fray Marco and Xicotl crowded forward in eager questioning.

"It is all very simple, my friends. It was just as Xicotl has said all along. The trail that her party left was clear enough. The men who picked her up three weeks ago found her in a tornado and mistook her for a goddess whom they call Ari-zuna and they have installed her in the temple, where she is well served. They asked her last night to bless the crops for them and she was doing it when I saw her. What are you shaking your head and muttering about, my good fray?"

"Do you mean, my son, that she has accepted the worship that belongs only to the saints?"

"Hm! It seems to be pretty well divided, in this land, between gods and goddesses, snakes and pretty girls. For Heaven's sake, split me no theological hairs just now, good father. Let me do a man's work first; you can do a priest's work later."

"I will! 'If I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon,' I say, 'the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.' Will we wait long, my son?"

"How can I wait? When every heartbeat clamors for speed upon the southern trail? She will meet me tonight at sunset. We must scrape together every ounce of green food for the horse and see that he gets a bellyful of feed and water, for by all the saints! he must travel far tonight."

"Your plans?"

"Does the coyote plan when the hounds clamor behind him? They will pursue us, of course, just as soon as they discover that she is missing and they will trail us with all the skill at their command. You know what that is. Our only hope is to head south as direct as we can and to travel as fast as is possible. We must outstrip the pursuit. Can three men fight a tribe?"

"They may when God is with them, Who has said through His prophet—

"'One man of you shall chase a thousand.'"

"Hm! Let us not put that to the test till we are compelled to do so. I am a good Catholic, I trust, but, for today at least, my creed is: '*Quod tàngo, credo.*' ('What I touch, I believe.') Fill those water-bags carefully, Xicotl, and look to every strap and buckle on saddle and bridle. Nothing must break tonight. Pack our few belongings at once so there will be no delay, then both of you get what sleep you can. I will watch. You will need all the rest you can get."

So hour after hour throughout that long, hot June day they lay sweltering in the shallow crater in the sand. It was too hot to talk. It was too hot to do anything but move from side to side and follow the shifting shadows of the cactus and the prickly-pears, as the sun threw the shadows from west to east.

Andres examined his horse critically. He was tired and exhausted but the light in his eyes was undimmed. His shoes, of course, had long since gone, but he had not been ridden and had carried light weight; but now Mercedes must ride him and he would need shoes. Well, he must go barefoot tonight.

When they got to the hills, shoes could be made from the first deerskin that they took.

At last, when the sun was well down on the rim of the desert, Andres prodded his companions into life.

"I am going now. I need not tell you to be careful. Keep the horse well down in the hollow. I leave him here so that I will leave little trail. Xicotl, while I am away, if any wandering Indian comes near this place you must deal with him with your *macahuitl.* He must not escape. Understand that clearly. They are quiet enough just now, but let them once believe that a party of men has come here and carried off Ari-zuna from their midst, and they will change, or I miss my guess. Remember, now, to keep your heads below the rim of the crater. When I come back I will give a signal—thus——"

He gave the shrill *yap-yap* of a coyote till one afar in the desert answered him. A moment later and he had swung up out of the hollow and, before they were aware of it, had faded away into the blue darkness of the night.

"God guard him," said Fray Marco softly, "for he is a proper man."

Xicotl said nothing but polished, with his hand, the knob on the handle of his *macahuitl.*

WHAT of Mercedes?

She went back to the city, an entirely different girl since two hours before. Then, there had been no hope of any future for her; no prospect of anything but a life-long dwelling here, so long as the Indians proved kindly.

She passed through the main gate and climbed the narrow ladder into the temple, where she was greeted by her attendants. The three priests sat in silence outside the door, their heads wrapped in their blankets.

An hour later a girl brought water to her and bathed her feet, and a little later two others brought the morning meal—little cakes of maize flour and again the round pieces of white meat that she had often eaten and speculated upon.

"What are these, Maota?" she asked.

Maota, surprized, pointed to a great snake that moved sluggishly across the floor of the temple.

"Earth-runner," she said slowly. "Do the gods not know?"

Mercedes felt herself turning sick. So this was the food that she had been thinking was delicious for the past month. She felt faint and ill and, rising, moved toward her couch, when all suddenly turned dark before her. One hand, hastily upflung against the wall, saved her from falling. As women will, she raised the other hand to her hair and was suddenly conscious of a sharp pain. She had severely scratched her hand on her last remaining hairpin.

With a little throaty cry Maota sprang forward, seized Mercedes' arm and looked long at the red scratch from which a few drops of blood were oozing. She shook her head as she carefully wiped them off with a piece of white cloth. Still faint, Mercedes flung herself at length upon the bed and thought and thought.

Well, it would not be long now! This very night would see the end of it! She knew that she was taking a great risk. She felt very sure that as long as she accepted her position with the Indians she was safe, and she knew that if she failed to escape their resentment would be quick and certain.

An hour passed. She had dropped off into a fitful sleep. When she awoke it was midafternoon and she was still alone. She rose and looked out from the wooden-barred window that gave upon the town.

Hot and white and aching, the town spread beneath the staring June sun, every house covered with white stucco that reflected the white-hot rays. Even the street, paved with hard-trodden, red earth, took on a metallic sheen, and the blazing sky seemed a shimmering blue bowl from which a flood of liquid fire poured down upon the earth.

As she stood by the window, a few words of low-voiced talk came to her from the ground beneath, where the three priests had been sitting when she came into the house. Raising herself on tip-toe, she could barely discern the figures of the priests, still squatting in the shadow of the wall. The voice was the voice of Maota, her maid. She spoke in a low voice that carried well.

"And Ari-zuna said, 'What is this meat?'"

"She knew of course that the gods eat the meat of none but earth-runners. She spoke to try your faith," said one of the priests.

"She was ill when I told her it was the meat of the earth-runner," said Maota obstinately. "Does a god bleed?" she asked presently.

There was a short silence.

"I ask you again: Does a goddess bleed like we do? I tell you I saw it today. This Ari-zuna of ours came in warm from the blessing of the fields and when she raised her arm she scratched her hand and—it bled. I wiped away the drops upon a cloth and brought it to the priests of my people—thus."

Mercedes felt rather than saw that a cloth was being passed from hand to hand in the silence. Presently a priest spoke.

"This must be spoken of in the full council," he said heavily. "It is not fit talk for a woman to hear."

"Yet, O Ikoni, a woman has told you of it."

"No matter. I will summon the full council of the priests to meet while this, our Ari-zuna, is in the fields this night. If it is found that she has not the right—well, there will be an accounting. You are right, my daughter, a goddess does not bleed, nor does the meat of an earth-runner make her ill. If she is not Ari-zuma, who then is she who came in a tornado? The full council will decide. Let Ari-zuna go tonight to the blessing of the fields. Later we will see."

Maota nodded, and Mercedes heard her feet shuffling across the courtyard.

If she had previously entertained any doubts about making her escape, what she had just overheard stilled them all. She must remember and tell Andres every word of what she had heard, so that there should be no doubt in his mind either. There was just one chance for them all, and that chance they were to take that night. In this excited, nervous, overwrought condition, the hours seemed endless to Mercedes, till at last, as the sun was slowly sinking behind the saw-toothed range of hills, the four girls gave her again the sacred meal and salt. And, in company with the priests, with a great crowd behind them, they stood watching her as she walked slowly down the rocky path leading to the cultivated ground.

She felt that they were watching her. She was sure that Andres was already waiting for her in that sheltering line of small trees, but she also knew that she dared not near that shelter till dark should be almost upon them. They must make it impossible for the Indians to trail them.

She paused at the first corner and scattered a handful of the meal and the crowd, watching her from the mesa, saw her drop upon her knees, and, with outstretched arms, appeal as they thought to the gods of the Moqui.

Mercedes prayed, but to a very different God.

She rose and moved slowly down the field, a very Ceres, her golden hair rippling to her waist. Her turquoise eyes blazed with excitement, the golden grain dripping from between her fingers as she went. Closer and closer she drew to the belt of trees, and at last the sun was fairly down behind the hills and night fell suddenly upon them as a blanket falls.

"Softly now, *señor!*" Her quick eyes had caught a shadow moving among shadows. "I have come."

THE next moment her hands were firmly gripped in his, and Andres' voice, vibrant with excitement, rang in her ears. She heard it as one hears far-distant surf, far away but clearly.

"*Por Dios!* How I have worried! I have suffered the torments of the damned, *señorita*—Mercedes."

The last two words were so widely separated that she could take which she chose.

"Come! We have not a moment to lose. They will not miss you for an hour and then it will be too dark to trail until morning. We will have a fair start."

"It may be not."

And, as they swiftly crossed that eight miles, she told him the talk that she had overheard by the window. To her surprize he laughed.

"Time to worry over that when they

have taken us. Wait. I must give the signal."

And the *yap-yap* of a coyote almost in her ears made the startled girl jump. In answer a tall figure hove suddenly up against the skyline.

"Is it you, *señor?*"

"Yes, Xicotl. Be quick, now, with the horse. This is no time for ceremony, man."

For Xicotl had flung himself upon his knees before the girl and Fray Marco, coming quickly up, his voice trembling with emotion, blessed her fervently.

"Work and pray, good father. Even the scriptures place work first. Now, *señorita*—"

"I like Mercedes best," said the girl demurely.

"*Bueno!* Mercedes it shall be from now on—till I make it something else."

He half whispered the last as he swung the girl into the cumbersome demi-piqued saddle and, with a hearty slap, sent the startled horse plunging up the slope.

"Which way? Over there, *señor?*"

Xicotl pointed to the trail along which they had come.

"Never. They will strike that trail first and will head back on the road by which we came. Let us head a little north of west. We can circle to the south when we have crossed the mountains. Make the horse trot fifteen minutes in each hour, Xicotl, and we can travel six miles an hour."

For nearly three hours Mercedes' absence caused no comment in Acoma. As soon as she went down the hill Ikoni, the high priest, summoned the others to meet in full council in the *kiva* below the temple, where he laid before them what Maota had told him. The consultation was long, the debate stormy. At its conclusion, the priests came out of that hot room dripping at every pore, and Ikoni called out to the waiting girls—

"Ask Ari-zuna to join us in the great room."

"She has not yet returned from the fields."

"What? Why has she delayed so long?"

"We know not. This morning she was gone but a short time. Tonight, none has seen her."

"Send men at once to the fields to search for her. It may be that she has taken the wrong turning."

The party sent to look for her found no sign, and when morning came they had so crossed and re-crossed each other's trails in the soft ground that none could follow the prints that Mercedes and Andres had left. It was not till well after sun-up that they picked up the tracks and then they were much disturbed by the prints of the horse's feet, which were unknown to them. Ten miles out the trail became clear and the pursuers followed at a run.

Andres traveled almost as fast, hampered though he was with the horse. They dared not push too fast at first. If he should break down now it would mean ruin for them.

The sun clanged up in a brazen sky. Little lizards, abroad during the cool of the morning, barked at them across the hot rocks. A swirl of heat-haze rose before them and once they saw, far away in the offing, a faint mirage such as Andres had seen before: the image of the city hanging in the sky.

On they went. They came to the foothills and the great main range stood up above them in its red and purple splendor, its shadows showing umber and blue and dun in the dawning.

"Now comes the test," Andres almost groaned. "We must leave here what little cover we have and take to the bare hillside. A fly can be seen on it for twenty miles almost. Yet we must cross it. If there are Indians following us they will see us when we leave the plain. Up we go!"

There was no help for it. They took the hill at a trot and when they had climbed a short quarter of a mile over the slippery, brown shale, as bare of cover as a mahogany table, Andres looked over his shoulder. With a startled oath he turned again and slapped the blowing horse with his sword sheath.

"On! If you love life," he said fiercely. "On and over the ridge!"

Not two miles away, crossing the last sandy patch over which Andres had come, was a party of Indians coming on at a slinging trot.

The horse could not be spared now. Speed was everything. They must cross that frowning ridge and find cover before the Indians should top the slope. On and up they plunged, breathless and panting.

It was partly instinct, partly luck, but Andres had noted a slight depression in the ridge as they ascended the slope. He felt sure that on the far side there would be a swale that could cover them, and there was. It was not much of a shelter at first, but it covered them from sight as they turned into it and fled at redoubled speed for the bottom of the ridge that was marked by a line of trees.

As they went, the swale deepened and closed in on them till, as they got lower down, they found themselves in a walled cañon whose walls came down precipitously, walls of smooth rock crowned in places with stunted live oak and piñon pine that almost overhung the narrow path along which they fled.

Andres was leading at a run when a crash and a startled exclamation from Xicotl brought him to a halt. The horse was down, struggling hard, with a foot wedged between two sharp rocks. Sweating and snorting, he struggled to his feet and stood trembling, his left fore-leg swinging limp below the knee.

"His leg is broken," Andres almost sobbed. "Leave him—and quickly! We must look for shelter and hold them off if they discover us. Look for cover!"

He seized his pistols from the great holsters on the saddle and started on, passing his arm about Mercedes' waist to help her along the rocky trail.

"There! Look there, my son! It is high up but it can be reached!"

Fray Marco pointed, calmly enough, to a tiny hole in the hillside that was almost hidden by the tip of a piñon pine that grew below it. It was poor enough but there was nothing else.

Scrambling, slipping, sliding, somehow they got up that rock-face to the hole some forty feet above the cañon and saw a tiny cave open out before them. It ran straight into the hill for ten or fifteen feet. Still, it gave shelter.

"Lie down, Mercedes." Andres pointed to a shallow dip in the floor. "Put the water-bags by her, Xicotl. Now for our defense, if it comes to that."

He emptied the arrows from his quiver and laid both of his great bell-mouthed pistols by them, and carefully examined their fuses and the ponderous wheel-locks.

"See! There they come. I count eleven."

They came at a quick trot down the cañon, halted in astonishment when they saw the horse, then opened out and passed him. Their true mission lay farther on. They saw at once the trail where the party had left the bottom and had scrambled up the rock-face. A child could have told it. One of the Indians stopped to scan the rock-face, saw the cave-mouth and with a sharp cry pointed it out to his companions.

As one man they surged forward and Fray Marco, who incautiously exposed himself, heard a whistling rush beside his ear and an arrow broke into two pieces against the rock by his head.

The fight was on!

XI

TO show themselves at the cliff edge, to use either stones or arrows, meant instant death by Indian arrowshot. To remain quietly under cover meant that the Indians could approach unseen and rush the cave when they got ready.

"Roll all the loose rocks to the edge of the cave and build a wall along the lip of the cliff," said Andres quickly. "That will shelter us from their arrows and check any rush they may make till we can use our swords. Pile those rocks up, I say."

"Here are rocks, *señor*."

Xicotl stumbled forward, his arms filled with oblong stones. Andres seized them and nearly dropped them in his astonishment.

"These are not rocks. They are adobe bricks," he said quickly. "Where did you find them? How came they here?"

"I know not, *señor*. Across the rear of the cave there is a wall built of them. I picked up four that were loose."

"Never mind that now! Bring more!"

Fray Marco and Xicotl labored feverishly, supplying Andres with the flat

bricks. He piled them hastily across the entrance till he had a wall two feet high, exactly on the lip of the cliff, so that the attackers would have no foothold there while attacking. To do this he was forced to lie prone on his face for shelter from the arrows and push the first rows of bricks into place with his sword sheath.

"Now—" when the wall had risen to sheltering height—"we can rest a little. Is there any sign of life below except for the arrows?"

There was none. The silence of the desert overhung the place.

"Fray Marco, please watch here with Xicotl. You can creep quite close to the wall here and see the valley through the space between the stones. Call me at the first sign of life. I wish to examine the wall that Xicotl found at the rear of the cave."

Fray Marco took his place by Xicotl and Andres, followed by Mercedes, stepped back to the rear of the place.

The cave ran for about fifteen feet into the rock, evidently following a natural fissure. Squarely across the rear of it an unmistakable wall had been built of adobe bricks. Most of them had been torn away by Fray Marco and Xicotl, but there remained enough to show that the wall had been originally built to fill in entirely the entrance to a smaller cave that drove back into the hill for perhaps ten feet. The walls beyond the brick barrier were smooth and showed beyond any doubt that they had been cut by man.

"Curious."

He took Mercedes' hand as he stepped across the barrier. "It seems to have been a room regularly built and arranged by man. Let me enter first. There may be snakes."

Remembering all too vividly her experience with snakes, Mercedes stood at the entrance, her hand on her heart, while Andres looked about him. Presently she heard him call her. She went forward and saw wonder and astonishment written on his face as he came toward her.

"It is the most wonderful thing in the world," he said in awe-struck tones that echoed through the place. "It is a burial place for the—the——"

"Indians." Mercedes drew back.

"I do not think so. That is the odd part of it. Some one has been buried in this place. See! It has been walled up to form a crypt for burial. Look!"

He led her to the rear of the enclosed place and pointed to a stone platform that filled the space. She could not see the top of the platform.

"There is the platform," he said in a curious tone that was thrillingly tense.

"In the platform there has been a niche made and in that niche a man has been buried. I do not think he was an Indian. It has been a veritable sarcophagus. In times long past some one has buried a man here. No ordinary man either."

Mercedes gave a quick little cry of alarm.

"There is no need for alarm. Look again! There is far more to it than we can even guess."

In the long, narrow niche in the middle of the stone platform lay a knife of old and tarnished copper. The rock around it was stained green with copper stain. Several bones, arm and leg bones, lay in the receptacle, but the skeleton as an entity had long since disappeared. At the end where the head had rested lay a great copper helmet, crested with a rough representation of a bison's head. Never having seen one, Andres thought it was the head of some monster; and along one side of the crypt were laid a number of arrows, unfeathered, but tipped with green and tarnished copper.

"Do you see?"

"I don't understand," said Mercedes feebly.

"Do you remember that the Indians outside are but shoulder high to me? They are small men. This man—" he pointed to the space between the helmet and the bones of the feet—"stood nearly seven feet. He was not an Indian. These arrows—" he picked them up—"are made of reeds. This is a dry land and no reeds grow here. Men do not go far afield for wood for their arrows. They use what is nearest. When these arrows were made, then, reeds were nearest and this man lived at a time when all this land had water on it. This helmet too is far too big for any ordinary man—myself, for instance. He was probably a chief or a great warrior and was buried here

where none would ever disturb his remains. See——"

He picked up the copper casque and nearly dropped it in astonishment.

"*Por Dios!*" he exclaimed, and as the startled Mercedes looked she saw him thrust his hand wrist deep into a little pile of flashing green stones that had been concealed beneath the helmet.

"What are they?" she asked breathlessly.

Andres drew his breath hard and opened his fingers, letting the stones trickle through his open hand.

"What are they? They are treasure trove that is come to us too late to use. They are wealth, beside which the fabled cities of Cibola are poverty-stricken. They are emeralds of the purest water, and some of them have been carved and worked. Look!"

Three were preeminently beautiful. One huge stone was carved into the shape of a rabbit and carried a drop of gold in its mouth. Another had been roughly shaped like a human face, but it was the third that held their gaze. It was a prickly-pear, the leaves of which were of flat emeralds, the stem of soft red gold.

"Holy Mother! What wonderful workmanship. Remember, it was done by a people who had no knowledge of the use of iron. This is either art-magic or the man who was buried here was one of a lost race. Doubtless his race bequeathed to the present Indians knowledge how to make bricks and irrigate fields with a skill that equals our own. What is that?"

A SHOUT from Fray Marco drew them back to the cave. Andres slipped off his leather doublet as he passed out through the hole in the wall.

"Stay here," he said, flinging her the garment. "It is safest here. Take this leather doublet and tie up the stones in it. If we get away they will accompany us. If we are killed—well, then, I will have no use for the doublet. I am coming," he shouted in answer to a frenzied shout from Xicotl.

He was none too soon. Despairing of a direct attack up the slope in the face of three desperate men, the Indians had sent three of their number up the opposite slope of the cañon. They had climbed to a point higher than the top of the wall so they could see into the cave and from this vantage-point were sending arrow after arrow into the entrance. Even while Andres struggled through the gap in the wall, an arrow pierced Fray Marco's arm and another whistled venomously through Xicotl's bedraggled plumes and broke against the wall behind him.

"Inside with you," said Andres quickly. "You can do no good here. My bow will range farther than theirs, but if I use it it will make them conduct a long-range fight. We must tempt them to close quarters and get this matter settled by force of arms before we are starved out. If they besiege us we are beaten. We must tempt them to a rush when my sword, Xicotl's *macahuitl* and my pistols, most certain of all, will soon settle it.

"The Indians pray to an arquebus! They have never heard a gun! I warrant they break when they hear the report of arms for the first time. Ah! I have it! Xicotl, when the next arrow enters the cave, you give a great shout and spring into the air and fall so they will think they have killed you. They will be more ready to rush us."

A moment later an arrow whistled into the entrance. Xicotl with a sharp cry leaped high in air and dropped to the floor. He very promptly wriggled back to safety and lay laughing at the ear-piercing yells that rose outside.

"I think they are preparing for a rush. I will take a last look at my pistols. They must not fail me now. I have but six charges left."

He drew the charges from the bell-mouthed brass barrels that measured two hand-breadths across the muzzle and reloaded them very carefully. As a last precaution he rammed home in each a double handful of good-sized hard pebbles over the seven bullets with which each was already loaded.

"The Count of Pistoja, who invented them, never loaded them better," he said grimly. "My faith! How they gather in the valley! It is a scant sixty yards. I can not resist it, Fray Marco. I shall fire one pistol at them as they stand in that group yonder. Here goes——"

And before Fray Marco had time to

stop him, Andres laid the long barrel on the wall, took a rough sight above the group, to allow for the drop in trajectory and fired.

The heavy, reverberating roar filled all space and rolled back and forth in the narrow cañon in wave on wave of sound. One Indian dropped in his tracks. Another limped painfully away, clutching himself wherever he could reach. The rest, with startled shouts of terror, scrambled down the hill again and sought cover up the cañon.

"I could not help it! It was poor strategy but I could not help it. What was that?"

He gazed at his companions open-mouthed, for the walls of the cañon suddenly reechoed a second time and shook and trembled again with a roar as of musketry.

"An echo——"

"An echo. The echo of my shot died away while the Indians were running. No ech—there goes another!"

"That, *señores*—" Fray Marco sprang to his feet—"is a shot from a Spanish caliver——"

"It is—" quoth Andres, also springing up—"or all my soldiering goes for nought."

He fired the second pistol and fell to recharging both.

A second and third shot down the cañon answered him.

"Look, *señor!* See how the devils run."

Xicotl, who had crept back into the open at the sound of the shot, pointed to the Indians, who, far up the cañon, were running for dear life up the ridge and through a gap at the entrance to the cañon.

"Who can it be? What means it?" Mercedes laid a startled hand on the very dirty sleeve of Andres' shirt.

"I do not know for certain. It is very likely a party sent out by the governor to seek for you. Yonder they come—beneath the oaks over there! See where the red and yellow *peloncillos* flutter at their lance points. See the good horses coming on at a trot, Indian trailers ahead. What is the banner that the leader carries?"

He peered through the swaying tree-tops.

"Silver fishes on a blue ground! Diaz! Diaz of the golden belt, as I live! Friends, they are our own people! It is Coronado's men!"

HIS welcoming shout set the echoes ringing and rolling along the slopes, and the startled Spaniards, reining in their horses among the rocks, were suddenly aware of a very disheveled Andres standing in their midst, with his arm unrebuked about Mercedes, while behind him Fray Marco rapidly told his beads till they clicked like knitting needles, and Xicotl, grinning, leaned on his *macahuitl*.

Diaz ripped out a great oath when he saw who it was and flung himself from his horse.

"My father always swore that he saw St. James, on his white horse at Tlacopan, fighting for us, but I doubted it. Now I know that the unbelievable is true. What is this miracle, Don Andres? How come you here? Where have you been? How comes the Señorita de Acasta with you?"

"*Poco-á-poco*" (Little by little), said Andres laughingly. "I will tell you all. Where is Don Francisco?"

"A day's march behind. We are but a patrol sent out to scour the country. We were about to return to camp when we heard your shot. I thought one of the other patrols had got into trouble with the Indians and so rode to the sound of your shot. A horse there for the *señorita*—now back to camp. This will be rare news for Don Francisco."

A panting Indian runner, outstripping the tired horses, bore the news to camp ahead of them, so that Coronado, swearing strange oaths, met them at the outposts and gave them such a welcome as touched Andres' very heart.

"Look you, Andres," he said when he had turned his tent over to Mercedes, "I was wrong. I knew it, too, at the time. I should have sent a dozen men with you at least, but I was hurt and angry that you of all men should leave me for a lesser quest. Now I know that I was wrong. Drink, man!" He filled the wine-cup. "It is like to be the last Spanish wine that you will taste for many a day. I have no more. Do you remember what Fray Marco said to me the night you left?"

"No. What was it?"

"He said that God would exact a fearful price of me. He has done it, Andres, unless you are the bearer of good news. Are you? You have seen the land to the eastward. Have you heard of a city called Acoma?"

"I have come from there," said Andres.

"What is it? A large and rich city?"

"No. It is an Indian walled city, peopled by a few thousands of Indians. They are semicivilized. It is one of the fabled Cities of Cibola, or so Fray Marco says."

"That accursed priest," Coronado groaned. "I have searched far and wide. I have fought three pitched battles since you left me. I took their chief town of Hawikuh. It, too, was said to be one of the Cities of Cibola. I took three other cities of which men said the same and now you come with a tale of Acoma. There is but one remaining city—Quiviri—it lies far to the east, men say. I must go there too. Is Acoma rich?"

"It is as you have described the others. No more; no less."

"Then," said Coronado heavily, "I have spent a million of my own money and the lives of many who trusted me in pursuit of a chimera invented by a lying priest. Truly God has exacted a fearful price, my friend."

"No, no, *señor*. You are wrong in part. You must remember that a priest does not see with the eyes of a soldier. The man was for three months fleeing alone through the desert. Why he did not die on the road I can never understand. Like St. John in Patmos, he saw strange visions."

"But—houses—houses covered with sheet silver—streets covered with copper—emeralds beyond price. Can you explain these things that he said he saw?"

"The houses were covered with stucco lime-washed. The streets were paved with red earth that showed like copper. The emeralds—ah! A word, *señor*——"

"A thousand if you like. What is it?"

"Of my own case. I was accused of the murder of the fiscal. So, too, was the Señorita de Acasta. She had never heard of it till I told her that the man was dead. There is some mystery in this that I can not fathom. I must return to face Governor Mendoza, *señor*, for this charge is now as far as ever from settlement. I am sure that the man Fonseca must have been knifed back there in Culiacan by—oh, by some one who admired him for his well-known good qualities. There! Is that speaking evil of dignitaries? What are your plans, *señor?*"

"Plans? I have few left. I must work south to the great river to run to earth the story of Quiviri lest it should turn out to be true after I have gone. As for you, Andres——"

"Yes——"

"My word is that you take a small party and push south again for our own frontiers. The *señorita* must, of course, be sent back, and your own honor is at stake. I will give you such letters to Mendoza that you can knife one of the officers each night in perfect safety——"

Coronado grinned at his scoutmaster, who smiled back understandingly.

"You will remain in Culiacan for six months at least. If I have not got back in that time, send me what reinforcements you can raise of horses and men. I will never leave this quest till I have once and for all settled the tale of the Cities of Cibola, though in very truth I think they are settled. I will give you such men and horses as you need to return. I will give you papers making you intendant of all my estates in Sonora till I return. You will leave, then, when the *señorita* is rested sufficiently."

FIVE days later; Coronado turned out all his men in gallant style to bid farewell to the little group of Mercedes and six men who were to accompany Andres on his homeward march. Very different was Andres' feeling as he swung into saddle on that hot July day from what it had been months before when he headed northwest on a well-nigh impossible quest. This time their trail had been pricked out for them by Coronado on a chart and showed that water would be plentiful. He halted on the ridge above the camp and looked back at the group of armed life beneath him. Coronado, standing under a great pole, from the top of which fluttered his own arms with the golden flag of Spain, waved his hand in silent farewell and Andres passed on down the far side of

the hill to join Mercedes, and together they rode into the heat-haze of the West.

Day after day they rode. Down through what is now Arizona, named for the forgotten sun-goddess of the elder peoples, crossing the White Mountains, then unnamed, back through what is now Tombstone and Tubac, till they came at last to the plain that slopes upward and southward to Culiacan.

"At last!" Mercedes reined in her horse at the crest of a low hill and pointed to a bright yellow spot that stood out against the sky. "Yonder is our goal, Andres—" yes, it was Andres now—"the flag of Spain."

"It is all that Spain stands for," said Andres softly. "It is life and liberty and——"

"And——" The girl looked oddly at him.

"And love," said Andres softly and watched the red blood mantle her face from cheek to brow.

"What is that bright spot yonder?"

"I think it is hope," said Andres softly. But it was not. It was only the hot rays of the evening sun shining on the burnished steel cap of a Spanish sentry on the walls of Culiacan.

XII

AS the little group, coming up the long slope, approached the gate, the sentry passed a call to the main guard, gathered in a small room in the massive walls. Followed a sudden clatter and clang. Dawn being long past, the gate was open and men and women were passing in and out, intent on the business of the day.

Up they came, Andres leading the horse on which Mercedes rode, as tired and beautiful a girl as ever had been seen in any port of New Spain. Her face was delicately tanned by the fierce sun, her garments patched and pieced with parti-colored cloths, some of Indian weave, some of Spanish make, till they resembled nothing. But her glorious eyes shone with a misty blue fire as they searched out the walls, the gate, the houses of the town and, last of all, on which they dwelt lovingly, the great golden flag of Spain, flapping idly on its staff above the governor's house.

As they entered the gate, the officer, standing tense and rigid before his men, took one look at her. Then his half-pike clattered into the roadway as he sprang forward with a cry.

"Señorita de Acasta! Señorita Mercedes! Is it indeed you come back as from the dead!"

"No, Señor Gomez, not from the dead, but from the living. Can we pass in?"

"Pass? You can walk over our dead bodies if it pleases you! Guard, there! Send a man at once to tell the governor."

A man sprang forward from that astounded guard and saluted.

"What shall I tell him, *señor?*"

"Tell him," said Andres coolly enough, "that Señor Don Andres de Avilez has come back with the Señorita de Acasta, and requests an accounting that he may justify himself."

The man dashed off at speed and long before the party, gathering adherents as it came, had reached the governor's house, it was the center of a great gathering, so that Mendoza, running out of the house as the heavy doors opened, had to fight his way through a dense throng.

"Way there! Way for his Excellency!"

He flung himself at Mercedes.

"My child! My child! Come back as from the dead! Avilez, how have you done this wonderful thing? Where were you? Where did you find her? I tell you, man, there is not that in all New Spain that will reward you for what you have done this day."

"*Poco-á-poco.* Give me an hour, Señor Governor, and I will tell you all."

"I tell you, man, that if you have done this thing——"

"Peace, *señor!* I did not. Under God, Xicotl yonder, my trailer, and my horse did it—especially, I think, the horse." And Andres smiled a little as he looked into Mendoza's eyes.

"I have come back, as you see, and as I told you I would, to clear my honor of the affair of the fiscal. The *señorita* knows no more of it than I did——"

"Come with me! Wait till I have sent for Maria, Mercedes' foster-mother."

There was no need to send for Maria.

She had heard the outcry in the street; she had seen the crowd surging up the entrance, and as they passed into the *patio,* she came running into the courtyard. One look at Andres and Mendoza told her that something unusual had taken place. The next moment her startled gaze sought the horse and she saw the rider!

"*Santa Virgen!*" she cried. "It is—it is my—my little *señorita.*" And she had Mercedes by the foot, by the hem of her gown, touching whatever part of her she could reach, petting her, fawning on her like a dog.

"Take the *señorita* to her rooms, Maria. All is as you left it on that terrible night." The governor turned to Mercedes. "Maria, get spiced wine and food for her. Have food and wine sent to my rooms, too, Maria, and take the best care of your *señorita,* who was lost and has returned. I leave it all to you."

"It has all been left to me for twenty years," sniffed Maria, still fondling Mercedes' hand.

Mendoza led Andres to the long room above the gate. A quick-footed servant had placed food and wine and *chocolatl* upon the table, and for ten busy minutes Andres ate. The governor sat staring at him with a feverish intensity that might well have been embarrassing. Presently Andres leaned back in his chair and filled an Indian pipe with tobacco. The governor came back as from a trance.

"Go on," he said, as if Andres had been talking all the while.

"When we had left the city and had gone a day's march, we found signs of a fight and I found the *señorita's* glove. Then we saw that something unusual had happened, so we trailed her. The men of the north had captured her and we followed them, Xicotl, Fray Marco and I. We found her and we brought her back and, Señor Governor, she knows no more of the death of the fiscal than did I."

"Tell me step by step. I want the details."

Andres talked late into the night, the great governor hanging on every word. When he had finished, Mendoza drew a deep breath.

"What of Coronado?" he asked presently. "When did you see him last?"

"Some six weeks ago. He was heading southeast for the great river and a city called Quiviri. I have papers for you from Coronado."

He laid the letters on the table. Mendoza read them eagerly.

"He had not found Cibola then?" he said presently.

"He found what undoubtedly had been Cibola, but it was not the great and rich city that reports had said it would be. He told me that he had investigated several of their cities and found nought. Personally, I saw Acoma, said to be their second greatest town. It was a walled city, it is true, where a half-civilized people lived; not so advanced as the Aztecs that we conquered in this land twenty years ago——"

Mendoza sat up straight.

"But Fray Marco said they were rich beyond our fondest dreams——"

"Aye! Rich in faith, *señor!* The good fray was never in them. His party was scattered before he got there, so that he reached the place with Estevanico and a few men. This Estevanico had learned much from Cabeza de Vaca of healing during his ten years' wandering with de Narvaez, and he passed himself among the Indians as a healer. They never let Fray Marco or Estevanico, nor the few men who remained with them, leave the ridge above the town, but held them there. Then, from all that I can learn, Estevanico took nine of their women as his wives. No matter what happens, *señor,* a people resent mistreatment of their women. One can upset their gods if he is able and nought happens, but abuse of women will drive any people to action. So Estevanico found. They captured and crucified him over an ant-hill. I saw that ridge and I found of Estevanico what the coyotes had left. It was two full miles from the city. When the sun shone, they saw it."

"He said the houses were covered with sheeted silver."

"He honestly thought they were. They were built of stone, covered with stucco, coated with lime. Remember, *señor,* that tales said that El Dorado was a man covered with gold. They found that he was a man on whom a small quantity of gold was blown through reeds as an offering! Fray Marco was worn out and ex-

hausted. He had seen his companions die in many ways, one by one, till finally he came to this city shining in the sunlight. All were driven away except Estevanico, and he was killed, and Fray Marco fled. He alone came back. With the best intentions in the world, Señor Governor, Fray Marco saw exactly what he was looking for."

"How mean you?"

"I mean that the active brain suggested to the tired body what it sought and it was seen."

"Then—then the great quest is a failure?"

"Wait! Is it a failure for a brave knight to essay a great venture and to come back, his hands untainted, his heart pure, his honor clean with a record of great work done and of the cross preached for a thousand miles throughout a heathen land? If this be a failure —then, *señor*, I can not tell what success looks like. If money be the only end sought—well, then, Don Francisco has failed indeed."

"But he has lost a fortune."

"The expedition was at his own charges. If Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado makes no complaint, the King of Spain can find no fault."

"How did Coronado take his failure?"

"As a true Spanish knight should. He goes farther afield. There were three pitched battles. When I left him he was about to try for a city called Quiviri, that lay far to the south along the great river."

"Was no wealth at all found?"

"I found a little on my private venture."

"What was it?"

Andres picked up the saddle-bags, that he had brought in across his arm, and opened them, taking out a roll of soft skin tied with thongs. Untying the thongs, he whipped the roll loose across the table and opened the flaps, disclosing to the astonished eyes of Mendoza row on row of blazing emeralds. Green and red where the light glittered in the bases, they flashed and sparkled; uncut jewels worth a king's ransom, and the larger stones flashing in their artificial beauty; all the stones that Andres had found under the helmet in the cave.

Mendoza sat astounded.

"Tell me where these came from and all the details.

"These are not the work of savage peoples. Where did they come from?"

Andres sat down and talked. He began at the moment he had left Culiacan, and he omitted not a detail till he told how they had come back in sight of the walls.

"And here I am, Señor Governor, still seeking my object, seeking my acquittal of the charge that I was implicated in the murder of that scoundrelly fiscal of the king."

Mendoza looked steadily at him, his eyes blazing.

"Andres de Avilez," he said presently, "I know now, as well as if the saints had told me, that you had nought to do with the matter of the murder. I have made every effort to find out who killed the man but with no results. The matter is still unsettled. I know that no guilty man would ever have returned. What was that?"

The two men sprang to their feet and stood staring at each other as a scream rang out from the women's quarters, followed by another and another.

"Saints and angels! Come with me!"

Mendoza whipped out his long sword as he ran up the long hall with Andres close behind him.

The door of Mercedes' room was open. In the middle of the room the girl was standing. Her golden hair streamed to her waist; her face was very pale and at her feet lay the very dagger that had killed Fonseca, its hilt of tortoise-shell and twisted gold bent and flattened, the blade still dark with tell-tale stains. A little farther away lay the body of Maria, face down upon the floor, her frame convulsed with sobs.

"What is it, Mercedes? For Heaven's sake, what is it now?"

"Nothing!" Mercedes drew herself up and shivered a little as she faced them, but her eye caught the dull gleam of the dagger on the floor and she shuddered again.

Maria, lying face down upon the floor, twitched and shivered, and her outstretched hands weaving in and out among the fringes of the rug struck the knife-blade, sending the dagger tinkling along the floor.

"Nay! Nay! *Señor*! It is time now! See, I will tell the truth of the whole affair. Once I have heard my *señorita* accused of the killing! It must not be so again! She is as innocent as the babe unborn of the death of the fiscal."

"Who, then—what know you of it? Who did it?"

"It was done for the best. There was no other way. It was your fault, Señor Governor, and when you would have corrected your fault it was too late. I will tell all."

"Tell, then." Mendoza seated himself quietly and drew his cloak around him.

"*Señor*—" Maria raised herself on her hands and looked him straight in the face—"it was I—I—who killed the fiscal."

"I know—" he did not know but he did know how to handle an Indian to extract the whole truth— "I know. Go on and tell me all."

"Listen, then, Señor Governor. That night, the night of the banquet, my little *señorita* came to me and told me that you had said that she must marry that—that —what shall I call him?"

"Go on."

"I loved her, as you know. You, too, love her, but not as I love, whose blood flows in her veins, for I nursed her, *señor,* when she was a baby. When she told me that she was to be married to that man against her will, *señor,* I swore it should not be. I intended to get Tematli, the man the fiscal had flogged, to send me one of his men to do the killing. Then came the day of the tax gathering and the *señorita* was struck, struck in the face before the crowd, and no man save only the tall *señor* there—" she pointed to Andres—"raised his hand."

"She came home that day and wept again. It was then, *señor,* that I saw my way. I gave her *peyotl* and I sent for Tematli and was about to tell him to have the man killed when I saw the yellow mantle hanging from the open window of the room where Señor de Avilez slept. I ran back to the room, took the dagger, pulled the yellow cloak from the window and came to the *patio,* where I found the fiscal standing."

"My cloak," said Andres wonderingly.

"I knew not. I did not care. It covered me. Without it I might not have got within knife-reach of him. I struck and ran."

"And then?"

"Wait! The knife was twisted from my hand, and I knew that when the body was found the *señorita* would be blamed, so I ran to Tematli—he is dead now—and told him to send four men to carry off the *señorita* and to keep her in the hills till I could escape. I knew that when I confessed it would clear her and I would not send in my confession till I was safe among my own people. I knew that she was under the influence of the *peyotl* and could not talk, and that she would not remember what had taken place."

"But you did not escape and you did not confess."

"No. I waited to hear from Tematli that she was safe. That word never came. Instead we got the word that she had been carried off by men of the north. I waited till we should hear. And—that—is—all."

She quivered and lay still.

The governor was the first to move. Her story, true to Indian morals, had held them like a charm.

"What think you, Avilez? Does the tale ring true?"

"What motive has she for a lie?"

"Do you know, Maria, what I now must do? Do you know that I must place you in custody?"

"I know."

Unnoticed by any of them, the twitching fingers had crept closer to the knife. Inch by inch she got it and drew it closer to her till in the dim light of the hall it was hidden in her clothing.

"I know what your Spanish law says, 'A life for a life.' It matters not if one life be worthless, be spotted with sin and crime and vice, and that the other be decent and proper. Well—Señor Governor and—*señorita*—my little, little *señorita* whom I suckled as a baby, to whom I taught the words and prayers that your dark priests teach—I tell you this, Señor Governor——"

She raised herself on her left hand and looked him full in the face as she lay.

"I know your law. It was not the law before the Spaniard came but we are

bound with heavy chains. Good! I am content to pay the price but I will not die and trust my Life-to-Come to the intercession of such as your priests teach. No! No! I trust to Quetzal! Quetzalcoatl of the golden hair and the kindly ways, who asks no sacrifice but a tender heart and true words—to Quetzal, then, and to—yes, to her—the tenderest, truest, softest goddess of my people, the only one who can understand the poor Indian—Ari-zuna—the goddess of the sun."

Before either of the men could see what she was doing, she had placed the point of the dagger against her breast just below her heart, the butt of the handle against the stone floor. She suddenly threw all her weight upon it and fell forward on the floor and lay still!

Mendoza swore a great oath and sprang to raise her from the floor, but it was too late.

"Brave heart," said Andres slowly. "Señor Governor, am I cleared?"

"Yes. Come with me, both of you. I will send women here. Quiet, my child."

For Mercedes, leaning against the wall, covered her face with her hands and burst into a quick flood of tears.

"Come, I say."

"One moment, Señor Governor. It is an ill moment, but one can not choose his time for all things. I come to you—I, Andres de Avilez, a gentleman of Spain, whose forefathers have worn coat armor for five hundred years. Through field and desert, through good and evil report I have sought Mercedes, and by the aid of God I have found her and, in all honor, brought her back to you. My own honor is untainted; my fortunes are restored. May I have her now that I have restored her to you? *Señor,* I have the honor to ask of you the hand of your ward, the Señorita de Acasta, in marriage."

"How say you, Mercedes?" Mendoza chuckled a little.

Mercedes said nothing for a little. She simply held out her hand, her face averted.

"*Bueno!* I think, Señor Scoutmaster, that you may take the hand as you seem to have already taken the heart. You have won more than Cibola."

Andres, taking no denial, raised the girl's hand to his lips as the governor passed out and closed the door.

"Cibola?" said Andres softly. "Cibola? If we had won the Cibola that they told us of, we would have won only gold and jewels and lands and power such as any mere king can win, but I——"

"Yes? You, my Andres——"

"I have won more. In truth, not every man can win a bride from the sun—and you are that—my Ari-zuna!"

Mercedes said not a word as she came into his arms.

BLENDED BRIGADES

by

SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE

Author of "Seignoirity of the Sea," "Sunless Seas," etc.

FOR the North West Fur Company's manager, Arthur Clendenning, it had been a typical day at the Athabasca fur post. He had arisen at daylight, gone forth to attend to his traps on the sunken Winter trapping-grounds and returned to barter for the furs of the Chippewa Indians who, on the verge of the Spring, had wisely sledged in from their far-flung trap-lines. He had eaten tollibee, or whitefish, for breakfast, dinner and supper, mended leaks in canoes and worked with his crooked knife on the blades of the spare paddles he was making for the annual descent of the fur brigades into the South.

He had done all these things as a matter of daily routine and now, suspending that routine till another dawn, he recorded his barterings of the day. On the thumbed pages of his day-book, shining yellow under the candle-light where it lay open on the trading-room counter, he proceeded to write the sum-total of his dealings in the terms of so many bales received for so many beaver—half-dollars—paid out.

While he wrote, the snarl of quarrelsome voices annoyed him and he glanced up over the day-book's pages to glimpse Perry and Weston, joint partners in the independent Athabasca post, bickering before his cavernous boulder-stone fireplace where, on the completion of some trafficking in supplies with him, they had seated themselves. Temporarily Clendenning had forgotten his rivals and guests, but now their language and their manner intruded on him.

He could see their familiar forms in the shadow at the farther end of the trading-room—Perry in fringed buckskin, his swarthy eagle face, framed by long, straight hair, glowing coppery as an Indian's in the firelight, and Weston in mottled woolens, flaming-bearded, sunny-haired, his skin as fair and his eyes as blue as any Dane's. Men of startling contrast they were, and Clendenning marveled at the whim of circumstance which had mated them in trade in the far Athabasca.

Grande Portage traders both, like himself and David Garland, whose near-by post added a third element of competition in the Athabasca, they had built up the lone Lake Superior depot of the early *coureur de bois* until it assumed the proportions of a half-way station for all the traders who trafficked in the West. They had erected buildings there along with the great Montreal firm of McTavish, Frobisher, Todd, McGill and MacGillivray; the house of Gregory and McLeod; the private firm of Garland and that of Clendenning himself.

As a consequence, a vast volume of business was handled at the half-way house. Rivalry was rife, each trader striv-

ing for the bulk of the furs and trying to spoil the business of the others. So bitter was the competition that at last the bulk of the traders combined in 1784 to form the North West Company.

Clendenning was one of the partners who amalgamated, but there was a dissentient section, named the Little Company and backed financially by the Montreal counting-house of Gregory and McLeod. To the Little Company David Garland had given his allegiance—not so Perry, however. The first white man into the Athabasca, he swore no combines should smother him out, and around himself he rallied the independents. It was inevitable that the outstanding figures of the other concerns would have to fight against his stand, so to the Athabasca the North Westers appointed Clendenning and the Little Company chose David Garland.

The most fur-glutted, perilous district in the West, the Athabasca demanded strong leaders, for there was a mighty prize to be snatched by one of the three. Here passed the freight of furs from all the Slave Lake country, bound out to Hudson's Bay posts on Hudson's inland sea. During the three years since the formation of the North West and Little Companies, the Athabasca fur lords had taken triple toll of the furs intended for the Ancient and Honorable Company on the Bay, roughly dividing them among the trio of posts in an allotment that varied with the business ability and bitter spirit of the leaders. It was this very point that Perry was arguing with Weston before Clendenning's flickering fire.

"WHY not take it all for ourselves?" Clendenning could hear Perry urging his partner. "Why stay here and allow the North Westers and Little Company men to tap the Slave country along with us? Let us go in there alone and lord it as independents should."

That he could carry out his plan Clendenning did not doubt. Perry, he knew, was a man of remarkable resource, a born explorer and one who had blazed his name along many new trails in the unknown North. His greatest fault was his lack of self-control. Impulsive, hot-headed, eager in his quests, he could not draw the curb, and his desire to dare the void spaces of the Western map amounted almost to a mania. When thwarted, he grew sullen, harsh in temper, swift and violent in his actions.

His partner Weston, on the other hand, Clendenning had appraised as a conservative man. Ponderous in his mental processes, loath to take any abrupt initiative, Weston saw little material gain in penetrating the unknown Slave country when the fur flowed from there to Athabasca. Thus friction had developed between the two, and this quarrel they had struck up in the shadows before the fireplace was their ancient dispute as to whether they should go or stay.

Perry's mania possessed him. He was all for trailing on where no North Wester or Little Company man was posted to fight him. Weston, however, demurred and counseled concentration on the Athabasca trade. It was the climax of an altercation that had lasted them all Winter. Penned up as they had been on the lake shore, ice-bound and shrouded in tremendous snows, now, like the free flood waters of Spring, their quarrel seemed about to break all bounds.

Clendenning knew their separate arguments by heart, knew them so well that he did not give them more than an instant's scrutiny before again lowering his glance to his day-book. He dipped his pen to make a fresh entry when a loud remark of Perry's caused him to drop it suddenly.

"I know the real reason why you want to stay," Perry snarled in Weston's face, as he waved a violent hand in the direction of the Little Company post. "It's David Garland's girl. It's Frances. But you know no maid of the Little Company countenances independents."

"Stop at that, Perry," interrupted Clendenning from his counter. "Argue all you like on a trade basis but don't bring a lady's name into the brawl!"

The two, who had forgotten Clendenning's presence in the heat of their argument, turned and stared at him, and Perry laughed a great, sneering laugh.

"Your pardon, Clendenning," he begged ironically. "Too bad to bring Frances into it, eh, when your own eyes turn her way? But remember that no Little Company maid mates with a North Wester, either."

"You'd better stop it, Perry!" warned Clendenning, half-rising from the counter.

"Sit down, Clendenning! You're host, I know, but sit down," growled Perry as he turned his back on the North West manager. "I haven't time to quarrel with you now. Weston and I must decide on our route into the Slave country."

Clendenning's well-bred face flushed and his blue eyes gleamed at Perry's contemptuous attitude. He vaulted over his counter as if to charge across the floor toward the independent trader, then, deeply disgusted with the intolerance of the man who persistently took up his altercation with Weston, he flung his pen back upon his day-book and strode out of the doorway.

LIKE a cool hand the velvet night air of Spring caressed his flushed face. Like a soothing wash to his gleaming eyes the waters of Athabasca shimmered under a faint aurora. Rimming the shores, the forest poised austerely, inky black against the silver sky, a forest lone and somber—the gateway to the wilderness, still more lone and somber, into which Perry proposed to drag Weston against the latter's will.

The immensity, the wonderful magic of that waking wilderness was healing balm to Clendenning's irritation. He forgot the insulting Perry quarreling with the stubborn Weston. Unconsciously his face took on a smiling expression and his eyes glowed softly in the silver dusk as they rested on the long lines of yellow canoes drawn up on Athabasca's margin.

Round the yellow birch-barks the bronzed canoemen sprawled before their cooking fires, bivouacking there ready for the southward paddle in the morning. They awaited only the coming of the Slave Lake brigades, due at dawn according to the courier who foreran them in his swift canoe.

A great journey stretched before these Northmen of the *pays d'en haut* and before Clendenning in charge of them, for the advent of the Slave brigades would mark his departure for Montreal to carry down the North West furs. It should mark, too, the departure of the independent traders on the same mission, and this circumstance had brought the argument between the partners to a climax. Weston was determined to go south with his share of the Hudson Bay furs, making the annual trip and maintaining headquarters as usual at Athabasca, and Clendenning could not help admitting that Perry had voiced the real reason for Weston's trip. Undoubtedly it was David Garland's girl Frances, the maid of the Little Company.

Just beyond the long line of the North Westers' bivouac, he could see another row of canoes, the fleet of the Little Company, whose log post hugged the fringe of spruce behind. More red fires winked there, and more bronze canoemen foregathered, shuttling between the fires as they carried bale after bale from the Little Company post to the canoe landing. David Garland and Frances were likewise bound for Montreal. The brigades would travel together, and Clendenning's smiling expression deepened and his eyes glowed more softly as he thought of the journey with Frances down the waterways of the Northern world. Where she went the men of all the companies yearned to follow. It was little wonder, Clendenning told himself, that Weston yearned to travel south instead of north.

He could see the girl herself in the firelight, her face the color of the forest rose, her hair like forest-filtered moonlight, as she went about with her father checking off the bales. Clendenning picked his way through his own canoemen to see how they were getting on.

"Is the Little Company post nearly finished, Frances?" he greeted.

"Very nearly now," she answered with a low laugh of satisfaction. "You North Westers beat us in arranging the loading, didn't you? I had to turn in and help my father. But morning will see us started."

"Yes, the morning," breathed Clendenning, glorying in her wide blue eyes, beautiful as fathomless opals in the firelight, "a morning that will bring us many things—the wilderness pathway, Ile à la Crosse, Grande Portage, Montreal, and who knows what after that?"

"Who knows what?" she echoed naively, diverting her glance under Clendenning's eager eyes. "One never knows what there is to dare."

"And win," added Clendenning mean-

ingly. "Hello, David," he greeted Garland himself as he strode up from the beach. "You've arranged the Little Company traverse, I see."

"Nothing to do but wait for the Slave brigades," returned Garland, laying an exultant hand on Clendenning's shoulder. "You have your own North West canoes ready to launch, also. What about our friends the independents? Are Perry and Weston bound south or north?"

"I don't know," confessed Clendenning. "They're at their old quarrel once more at my post yonder. They tried to drag me into it. At least Perry did, and mentioned Frances here."

"The impudent peddler,"* flashed Frances.

"Impudent indeed," nodded Clendenning. "But I didn't wish to brawl with him, so I stepped out. Good Heavens—hear that!"

The roar of a pistol at the North West post beat in on Clendenning's words. He wheeled instantly and bounded for the door, Frances instinctively following him, running light as a fawn at his heels with her father lumbering after.

"Be careful, Arthur," she warned as they reached the door. "That man Perry is violent and Weston is very determined. You don't know which one fired."

AS Clendenning, never stopping, pushed open the door, he knew. In the middle of the floor lay Weston, flaming-bearded, sunny-haired, doubled up in a grotesque shape, while over by the fireplace, just as he had sprung out of his chair, crouched Perry, his pistol still outthrust in his hand.

Frances cried out fearfully at the sight but, woman-like, bent over Weston as Clendenning sprang past at Perry.

"He's dead, Arthur," she breathed. "Stubborn and all, Weston's dead."

"I used the pistol in self-defense," snarled Perry, as if the words Frances spoke formed a direct accusation. "Clendenning, Garland, you'll have to bear me out in that. See, there's his knife on the floor beside him."

"We'll bear you out in nothing, Perry!" roared Clendenning. "We saw nothing. The knife slid out of his belt, for it's only half-way out of the sheath yet. Give me that pistol. We can't let a maniac like you go armed."

Perry spat an oath of denial and clubbed his discharged pistol at Clendenning, but the latter dodged low under his guard, clutching him about the body. Locked tight, Perry snarling and biting like a wolf, they rocked against the rude mantel of the stone fireplace, sending Indian relics, caribou horns, arrowheads and peace pipes crashing to the floor, their stamping moccasins striking the ends of the birch logs in the fire-pit and scattering the coals about the hearth.

Clendenning's foot slipped on a rounded knot and together they went down in the ashes, Perry wrenching free his pistol arm as he fell. He clubbed his pistol again and Clendenning, momentarily blinded by the dust-like ashes, could not see the weapon threatening. In another second the ponderous butt would have cracked his skull, but Garland was behind and Garland's quick hands caught Perry's descending arm, and twisted the pistol from his grasp.

"Thanks, David," coughed Clendenning, winking out the dust. "You saved me something that time. Yes, let go of his arm now. I can hold him all right."

His knee in Perry's chest, Clendenning had him pinned to the hearth, and, once the weapon was gone, Arthur dragged him up and put him back in his chair by the fireplace, the chair from which he had sprung and fired in his violent passion. Then the North West manager glanced about at the recumbent form of Weston and saw Francis covering it with a blanket.

"She was right, eh, David?" he demanded sharply. "There's no mistake?"

"No mistake," answered Garland, his eyes bent on Perry, weaponless in his chair.

"Well, then, Perry," Clendenning went on, "I guess your quarrel is settled at last and the direction of your journey too. You'll have to go south now instead of north."

"Of course," growled Perry, "curse the luck! I'll have to clear this matter in the Montreal courts before ever I can lay hand to trade again. But I'll make the trip worth my while, for I'll take all the Slave furs with me."

* Name given to independent traders who peddled their wares among the Indians.

"All?" demanded Clendenning. "You challenge us?"

"Yes," gritted Perry, "North Westers and Little Company men alike. When the Slave brigades come down at dawn, stand back, both of you, or you may get what Weston got. There'll be witnesses enough about to see that you go down in fair fight."

Perry was out of his chair and at the door before the two men could catch their breath.

"Remember," he warned them as he vanished, "if I cannot capture all the Slave trade in the Slave country I can do it here."

With a sinister wave of his hands he had gone to his own post, and the three in Clendenning's trading room stared at one another with alarmed eyes.

"It has come, David," Clendenning declared significantly; "the break of the trade has come. I knew three companies couldn't last long in the West. They've managed it somehow for three years, but tomorrow morning will see the end."

"Of what?" brooded Garland. "Of the independents?"

"Of all three concerns," prophesied Clendenning. "Carrying our trade rivalry into open warfare is suicidal, unless the North West and Little Companies stand together. I'll say it in plainer words, David, unless you and I unite."

Frances gave a faint exclamation. Clendenning's eyes went to her and he could mark the sudden color rising in her cheeks.

"I don't propose it for any personal ends," he explained, his eyes gleaming softly, "but as the means of salvation in case Perry carries out his threat."

"I know," Frances nodded, her face aglow. "You always put the North West Company before yourself, Arthur. Father, what do you say? Gregory and McLeod would not like to see their whole trade wiped out. Better a half-portion than nothing at all."

"The way it stands, we each take a third portion," persuaded Clendenning. "Let us get together, each take a half and let the independents go down."

"True, let Perry and his swine go down," accepted Garland with swift decision. "It is to save ourselves. I'll instruct my men and afterward I'll come back to help you bury Weston."

Garland passed out but Frances remained a moment after him. As suddenly as the bullet had come to Weston this thing had come to her, the thing of which she had sometimes vaguely dreamed, the time when force of circumstance should unite the North West and the Little Company. She could hardly realize the significance of the event or embrace its magnitude. It was left for Clendenning to phrase its meaning concretely.

"Frances," he whispered softly, "the Little Company will be no more shortly. There will be no such thing as Little Company men or maids, and there is nothing in heaven or earth to prevent a North West man from winning a North West maid."

He had forgotten the dead in the room. Love and life rang triumphant, and Clendenning was drawing the girl to him by her warm soft arms when she made a mute motion toward the still figure under the blanket. In the moment of recollection, Clendenning halted, and with an eloquent gesture of her soft palms against his lips, Frances slipped away and stole after her father.

CLENDENNING, after only two hours' sleep, was abroad in the early dawn. He had helped bury Weston during the night and done much other work as well. He was the authority at the North West post and it was necessary for him not only to pilot the fur brigades south, but to settle trade at the post itself and make a general clearing-up of the season's business in order to pave the way for the amalgamation of the North West and the Little Company. He and Garland had settled the outlines of the merger, although it would have to be ratified by legal means and the transfer of shares made at Montreal. The North West Company still stood as the parent concern and all partners in the Little Company would receive for their interests a full recompense of North West shares.

To leave no chance of failure or delay, Clendenning had despatched a courier to Île à la Crosse, where MacGillivray for

the North Westers and Rory Mackenzie for the Little Company held sway, announcing the death of Weston, the challenge of Perry and detailing the course he had pursued. He commanded their immediate cooperation and ordered them to send the news ahead to the other posts.

All of this made no small task, and nearly all night he had been poring over the yellow ledgers of the post, straightening out district accounts. Now, everything arranged to his satisfaction and his brain eased by the snatch of sleep, he roused his chief trader, Laflamme, from his bed to give the last of the Chippewa Indians their debt. Laflamme was more than half Indian himself, son of one of the early *coureurs de bois* and a savage beauty of Slave Lake. He was wise in the ways of hunters and could speak the dialects used from the Assiniboin plains to the Barren Lands. Clendenning could depend upon him and always made use of him as an interpreter in dealing with far-faring Indians. Now he gave him a free hand to finish the trade.

"Give the rest of them their debt, Laflamme, according to your judgment," he directed. "Run them off quickly while I marshal my brigades. The Slave Lake men may come in sight any minute. Remember, whatever happens, you are in charge of the North West post till Garland and I get back."

At Laflamme's summons, the last of the Chippewas came, phantom hunters from their phantom tepees on Athabasca's shore, passing Clendenning like ghosts in the morning mist as he walked down to his brigades. These were already astir over their cooking fires, eating a hasty breakfast which they finished as he came down. They kept watch while they ate, sighting over mist-blanketed Athabasca. Their report to Clendenning was that they could catch no sign of the Slave brigades as yet. It was wise to be ready, though. Clendenning could hear a hum of preparation over by the independent post, and rather than have Perry steal a march on him he thought it wise to be afloat.

"Launch the canoes!" he ordered.

On the breast of the lake that was beginning to glow like silver under the dissolving mist they ran them out, great six-fathom canoes of golden birch-bark. Then the paddlers stepped aboard—bowsmen, steersmen, three pairs of middlemen in each—awaiting the first glimpse of the Slave brigades and the word from Clendenning to move.

Clendenning himself made his way along the shore to Garland's mustering brigades. He had his canoes afloat also and, with Frances, was waiting at the waterline.

"Good morning, Arthur," Frances greeted demurely, her face as fresh as the dew-drenched wild rose. "We start with the sun and a good omen in the fair weather, do we not? Did you sleep at all last night? I see your Chippewas are getting the last of their debt, so you must have cleared up all your post business."

"I slept very little," admitted Clendenning. "I couldn't spare the time with all there was to do. And you, Frances? You rested well, I suppose, in spite of last night's nasty affair."

"Moderately well," she told him. "You didn't see anything more of Perry?"

"No," returned Clendenning, turning his head to listen, "but judging by the noise he's making, his wasn't an empty threat. There's trouble not very far ahead, David."

Garland shrugged his broad shoulders. "Well," he muttered, "he wants to make it, so the sooner he makes it the better. By heavens! Look—there are the Slave brigades!"

CLENDENNING and Frances both wheeled to stare where Garland pointed. Out of the dissolving mist the brigades had loomed all at once, over a score of canoes laden to the gunwales with furs. All gilded by the coming sun, the coppery shoulders of the Slaves gleaming blood-red as they worked the flashing paddles, the fleet bore in for the landing.

Instantly a shout went up from Clendenning's Northmen, and a redoubled clamor came from Perry's post. The independent men rushed forth in a stream for their own canoes, Perry in the lead yelling like a demon in his excitement. He lacked his big pistol of which Clendenning and Garland had disarmed him the night before, but he

carried a long-barreled rifle which he brandished over his head.

"Stand back, you North Westers; stand back, you Little Company men!" he roared, leaping into the foremost independent canoe. "I'll show you who barters with the Slaves!"

All his men were afloat in his wake, nearly one hundred of them—Montreal men, Sault men, Grande Portage men, half-breeds and Indians—heading for the incoming Slaves to make them first bid and secure the freight of furs they carried.

Against this motley crew Clendenning could boast of an equal number of Northmen drawn almost entirely from the *pays d'en haut,* and Garland controlled a full four-score of Little Company adherents. Perry's force looked as if it might be able to win in a three-cornered fight, and Perry himself was confident it could if Clendenning and Garland matched his move.

In his dare-devil recklessness he visioned himself emerging victorious with a balance of power from the wrecks of three companies and, utterly devoid of caution, he did not for a moment entertain the idea of the possibility of North Westers and Little Company men throwing their mutual strength against him.

Clendenning, till the sighting of the Slaves, had given no inkling of the merger. His brigades and Garland's brigades still lay a water-space apart, as usual, but as he leaped with Garland into his own canoe, it was plain to all, plain even to the approaching Slaves: North Wester and Little Company leaders sitting down in the same craft, together with a Little Company maid crying them victory from the shore! Even their aboriginal minds interpreted that.

In a flash Perry himself knew, but the knowledge came too late. The North West brigades were upon him from one side, the former Little Company brigades from the other, crashing into his fleet, dividing it, assailing the isolated sections from all directions.

It was a bitter charge Clendenning directed, ax and gun-butt crashing through the independent canoes where the North West prows did not stave them in in the first rush. Paddles rose and fell and the water splashed round the combatants manœuvring in a blaze of color. Here and there a knife gleamed, shooting a mirror-like flash through the maze, a pistol cracked or a rifle bellowed cannon-loud across the lake, but the brigades were too closely locked to permit much use of firearms.

The birch-bark shells bore the brunt of the blows and the independent craft suffered most. Outnumbered, surrounded, Perry fought like a maniac to stave off the rush, to prevent his fleet being swamped and to stay the North Westers from reaching the stoic Slave brigades. He was here, there, whirling his keelless craft in and out, crashing into their canoe-bottoms those who opposed him. His paddle flipped and his long rifle flailed incessantly, and all the time he shouted imprecations at the top of his voice, but his efforts could not stop the dashing attack of Clendenning.

Relentlessly the latter pressed Perry, foiling his every move, breaking up the canoes the independent man herded together. Swiftly, surely, Perry saw his chances disappear, half his fleet battered and sunk with the surviving crews crowding the remaining craft till they hampered all action and weighted the birch-barks down so that the gunwales shipped water.

Panic was seizing them, the panic of defeat. Some one cried out for them to save what they could, and at the cry the remnants of Perry's fine brigades whirled and scattered and, lurching and rolling wildly, fled off down Athabasca's shore.

PERRY cursed them for cowards as they fled. He himself was too proud or too frenzied to run. He swerved his own craft into the advancing row of North Westers and towered in his canoe-bow straight over Clendenning's birch-bark.

"By Heavens, you'll never tally the furs!" he snarled.

His long rifle that he had used only as a club and never fired, he poked into Clendenning's face, and Clendenning knew that the ball had been saved for him. Instinctively he struck, swiftly, viciously, smiting for life with his paddle blade at Perry's bare head fringed with its long

straight hair. The paddle blade struck true, but there was more than the stunning strength of Clendenning's arm behind it. For Garland, seeing the rifle muzzle flicked into his new partner's face, had breathed instantaneously a guttural command to the canoemen and dipped his own blade with all his power.

With a sudden heave the long craft was literally thrown forward from the Northmen's paddles, all the weight of its momentum as it struck being added to Clendenning's blow. Perry's rifle went off a foot above Clendenning's head and Perry's own head sagged strangely between his shoulders. Clendenning, glancing mechanically at the paddle smashed to fragments in his hands, could not for the moment understand; then he saw Perry's knees bend and his body pitch into the lake.

"Broke his neck, David!" he exclaimed amazedly. "The lurch of the craft, you see!"

"And small pity," growled Garland, giving the paddlers the command to back water. "Here are our Slaves with the furs."

The canoe drew up sharply with a washing sound and Clendenning, throwing away his splintered paddle shaft, took up a spare blade as he looked over the score and more of Slave canoes. They gazed at him stoically, not interested in the struggle of the white fur-lords, interested only in their trade.

Clendenning waved his new paddle toward the log buildings on the shore.

"Other years," he spoke to them in their own tongue, the tongue he had learned from Laflamme, "you traded at three posts. This year there is only one trade. The post of the peddler is empty and the other two posts are as one. Come ashore and get your trade."

A shout went up from the North West brigades, the shout of victory as they escorted the Slave canoes with their precious freight of furs. A North West maid answered the call from the shore where the bunched canoes landed.

"What a madman that Perry was, father!" she exclaimed as Garland stepped out beside her. "And how well the North West men fought! I speak of all our Little Company men as North Westers now."

"True," nodded Garland, "they are all North Westers now. But Perry's madness was worth while, don't you think, Frances? Look at the treasure of beaver, otter, fox, marten and mink he fought for, not to mention other things."

Indeed, it was a treasure of fur, and the clear profit on them Clendenning computed as close to one hundred thousand dollars. He still sat in his big canoe making the tally while the Slaves passed their bales from their own crafts into the crafts of the North Westers. Laflamme ashore gave out the trade bullets and, as fast as they were emptied, the Slaves drew up their birch-barks and made camp.

THE tally completed and the last Slave ashore, Clendenning beckoned to Frances and her father to board his craft—Garland sitting forward, Frances amidships and Clendenning himself beside her. At his word his eight canoemen dipped their paddles and his six-fathom craft led off. A cheer went up from the shore and Clendenning, with Frances gazed back to glimpse a great scene—the blended brigades, the canoes locked abreast, the crews chanting in unison and the three posts standing grim and stern on the Athabasca shore. One post was silent, deserted. On the other two Laflamme had hoisted the North West flag and their stockades were lined with cheering men.

A wilderness city cheered them, a city of hardy Northmen, of rising Indian tepees and hiving Indian fleets. The sight, full of the indefinable magic of the North, thrilled Clendenning to his heart. He had fought and won. He caught his breath with audible exultation. Frances at his side laughed a happy little laugh, and he looked down softly into her upturned face, feeling for her hand under the furs.

"They speed us south to Grande Portage and Montreal, Frances," he breathed. "Do they not speed us south as North West man and North West maid?"

Frances leaned back with him against the fur bales as one who would rest through a long, pleasant journey.

"Yes," she whispered, half in esctasy, half in dream, "North West man and North West maid."

Author of "Alias Whispering White," "When Civic Pride Hit Piperock," etc.

"I have been in lots of places,
Fair as lilies in the dell.
Some of 'em I kinda favor,
Others I don't like so well.
There is one that's ever calling,
'Come on back and hang your hat,'
Tough old, rough old town of Piperock,
You're a danged good town, at that."

"'MAGPIE,'" says I, "if my corns wasn't hurting —— out of me I'd have tears in my eyes from such sentiment. I'm all choked up—with alkali."

"You've got to admit that she rhymes," says Magpie Simpkins, spitting out a mouthful of dust and lifting his canteen to his lips. "I done figured 'em all out of my own head, Ike."

"You better leave off taking things out of your own head," says I. "First thing you know, old-timer, you'll be taking out what prompts you to chaw your grub, and I'll have to feed you with a stummick-pump."

Then we pokes off the mountain and hits the trail toward Piperock. For you who ain't never heard of Piperock, I'll say this much: Piperock was the place the feller was thinking about when he wrote "Let sleeping dogs lie."

Piperock looks like a siesta settlement, but she sure is deceiving. Few folks ever get killed in the town. The good old village usually invigorates 'em to a mile-a-minute clip, and we makes it a point never to shoot anybody in the back.

She ain't the birthplace of nobody, and nothing much except horse-thieves are buried there. When it comes to law and order, we've got old Judge Steele. He's got two law books and a copy of the Congressional Record for 1885, which about covers all the crimes that mankind is heir to, I reckon. Piperock ain't on no map nor railroad and she ain't never been sung in song or story, but if you don't think she's there, just get off the train at Paradise, ride north on Art Miller's stage to where he unhitches his team, and then start something.

She's there like sixty per cent dynamite and no questions answered. Me and that long-mustached, brainless, asinine arguer of a—well, me and Magpie have been away for two months doing assessment work on some mining claims that nobody would jump if we moved 'em down to the railroad and offered to develop 'em free of charge. We sort of hankers for the bright lights of Piperock. Even kerosene dazzles after using candles for two months.

Magpie stops, sudden-like, and appears to be looking down at a little flat below us. I adds my gaze to his and gets astonished right away. There is "Half-Mile" Smith and "Yuma" Yates. Half-Mile is one of our own home folks, but Yuma is sort of *e pluribus unum* with me and Magpie.

Half-Mile has got his boots and vest off and is standing a little ways from

Yuma, who is arguing with a gun in his hand.

"I don't *sabe* this play," says Magpie, wondering-like. "Appears to be a one-sided proposition with Half-Mile on the weak end, Ike."

Just then we sees Half-Mile make a break for liberty, and Yuma's gun whangs out loud and clear. If he hit Half-Mile he didn't get him in a vital place, 'cause he sure is hitting the high spots.

Magpie unhooks with his gun and I sees Yuma's hat spin off his head. By the time I gets into action Yuma is hived up behind a tree, and his first shot cuts three shells out of my belt. Magpie was a danged fool to miss his first shot, 'cause cover is mighty scarce on the side of that hill.

"Danged assassin!" yelps Magpie and spins lead past that tree so fast that Yuma don't dare to look out. "Shoot a unarmed man, will you?" And then his gun clicks on a empty shell.

"Give him ——, Ike!" yelps Magpie, but I wasn't giving anything away right then. I was trying to get my head down behind a rock which only stuck three inches out of the ground.

Yuma must 'a' got excited, 'cause his shots were all going high, and as soon as he shoots six times I breathes a sigh of relief. Just then a hunk of lead comes from another direction and knocks the plug of tobacco out of my hip pocket.

Then I hears Yuma yell:

"Get above 'em, Half-Mile! They need to be teached a lesson."

"Half-Mile, are you all right?" yelps Magpie.

"If you don't think I am, hang on to yourself for a minute!" replies Half-Mile from above us.

"King's X!" I whoops. "Mistake here!"

"Two mistakes," yells Yuma. "Who in thunder are you fellers?"

"Magpie and Ike."

"Oh!" says Yuma. "Sorry I missed."

Then the four of us stands up and looks at each other.

"Howdy, Magpie. Howdy, Ike," says Half-Mile. "Nice day today."

"Great," agrees Magpie. "Howdy, Yuma. How's your folks?"

"If I had any they'd be tolable," says Yuma. "Thanks just the same."

"You spoiled the best start I ever had," complains Half-Mile.

"No, he didn't," argues Yuma. "You beat the gun, Half-Mile."

"Not understanding the event and wishful to be wiser," says Magpie, "I asks would you elucidate the why and the wherefor of this peculiar conduct, Yuma?"

"Feet racin'," says Half-Mile. "I'm practising. Getting pretty fast."

"Uh-huh," says Magpie. "You having any success in racing with a bullet?"

"Racing with ——!" He stares at Magpie. "Think I'm a danged fool?"

"All depends on your answer, Half-Mile."

"Aw ——! When Yuma shoots the gun I runs as fast as I can, *sabe?*"

"How many times have you done it today?" I asks.

"Six, wasn't it, Yuma?"

"Seven."

"And you ain't hit him yet? Let me try just once, Yuma."

"Half-Mile," says Yuma, "these shepherds don't know nothing. Let's go home."

WE didn't try to stop 'em. We punched our burros into line and at the main road we meets "Scenery" Sims. Scenery beat Magpie for the sheriff's office, and this is the first time we've met him in his official capacity. He's my idea of nothing to see nor hear, being as he never growed to man's estate and his voice sounds like rubbing a tin can over a rock.

"He, he, he! Was afraid maybe you hadn't heard about it," he squeaks.

"Fill our ears, Scenery," says Magpie, rolling a smoke.

"Biggest thing you ever heard about, Magpie. Believe me, I'm the party responsible for it all. Piperock needs you fellers."

"That's plenty for me," says I. "I'm going back the other way. I've been butchered to make a Piperock holiday, and any old time that Piperock needs me, I'm absent."

"Hear about it anyway, Ike," urges Magpie. "Go ahead, Scenery."

"Old Home Week," grins Scenery. "What do you think?"

"Go ahead—we'll bite," says I.

"Whatever it is it won't last no week," says Magpie, prophetic-like.

"The big celebration is all in one da. All the old-timers will be there; *sabe?* This is going to be a *hyiu* time, if you asks me, and she's going to be full of brotherly love and peace on earth, good will to all menkind."

"In Piperock?" I asks, and he nods.

"Brotherly love?" asks Magpie, and he nods again.

"Well," says I, "if you was a big man, Scenery, or could pull a gun real fast, I'd say you're mistaken, but being whom you are I'll say you are either a danged fool or a liar."

"Quit that now!" he squeaks. "Quit it! Dog-gone you, Ike, I've got a lot of power I didn't used to have."

"All the old-timers?" inquires Magpie.

"You heard me say it, didn't you?"

"Hoss-thieves, et cettery?"

"Immune for a week, Magpie. I has issued my proclamation."

Magpie looks at me sort of sad-like.

"What do you think, Ike?"

"When does the battle begin?"

"The celebration will be on Tuesday."

"This is Sunday," says I, "which gives one whole day to dig ourselves in and two whole nights to spend in prayer. Go ahead, Magpie, and may the Lord have mercy on the children 'cause there won't be no old folks next year."

Piperock ain't changed none to speak about. As we pilgrims into the main street we sees "Tellurium" Woods gallop out of Buck's place, and just as he skids into Pete Gonyer's blacksmith shop we hears the bang of a gun. Then out of the saloon comes "Tombstone" Todd. He peers all around.

"Whyfor the salute, Tombstone?" asks Magpie.

"Salute ——! Think I'm shooting blanks? Tellurium argued that I ain't eligible to stay here for Old Home Week. Said the only time I ever was here a delegation comes from Paradise, decorates me plentiful with tar and feathers and rides me off on a rail. Dang Tellurium's hide!"

"Don't you remember the incident, Tombstone?" asks Magpie.

"Don't I? Sufferin' snakes, I didn't moult for two months! Scenery said I could stay here as long as I dwelt in harmony and brotherly love, and, by cripes, I'm going to foller the recipe if I has to decimate the whole danged village."

Me and Magpie nods and pilgrims on to our shack.

"Brotherly love seems to have come upon them," says Magpie. "This town appears mild and full of loving thoughts. Next thing we know, Ike, these snake-hunters will be carrying autygraph albums and wish us to write—

> If you love me as I love you
> No knife can cut our love in two.

"And the bunk-house walls will be decorated with 'Let Us Love Each Other' mottoes. I wouldn't be surprized to see 'Hassayampa' Harris kissing 'Doughgod' Smith."

"That's a fact," I agrees. "She sure is a sweet-cider atmosphere. Next thing we know they'll be decorating horse-thieves' graves. Do I seem to hear joy bells ringing, Magpie?"

"That's 'Dirty Shirt' Jones, I'll bet a dobie dollar," says Magpie. "One, two, three! Nope, he ain't drunk yet, Ike."

Magpie was counting the clangs of a bell. Dirty Shirt uses that bell as a barometer. It hangs on the corner of the Mint Hall, about sixty yards from the door of Buck's place, and the bell is a little bigger than a cow-bell. Any time Dirty misses one out of three shots with his Colt he's drunk enough to quit. As long as he can ring her three times in a row he keeps on until he can't.

Me and Magpie don't no more than get settled when here comes old Judge Steele. The old pelican is full of enthusiasm mixed with a certain percentage of alcohol and he welcomes us home again.

"You gents sure came back for the crowning e-vent of our lives," says he. "We welcome you home and likely we can use you."

"Use Magpie," says I. "I'm out of order."

"Huh!" snorts the judge. "Ornery as ever, eh, Ike? You ain't got as much civic pride as a cat!"

"Maybe not," says I, "and I've got eight less lives. I may die when my

time comes but I ain't rushing the e-vent. Piperock is always starting something that they can't finish without bloodshed and horror."

"We're progressive," explains the judge. "We sure are—to a startling degree, and the eyes of the world will e-ventually turn to Piperock."

"They will," says I, "and this is what they'll be saying: 'The words on that tombstone are appropriate: They Couldn't Let Well Enough Alone.'"

"This here celebration amounts to what?" asks Magpie.

"Mostly everything, Magpie. On Tuesday we has the celebration proper. There will be feet races, tugs-of-war, shooting matches, et cettery. Lot of the fellers are practising for the events and she bids fair to be a humdinger.

"We aims to put Piperock on the map, Magpie. Always our inhabitants has to go to Silver Bend to see the sights, such as a circus or a opery. If we can advertise Piperock sufficient-like we can get said attractions and keep our money and young men to home. You was pretty good as a ordinary sheriff, Magpie, but you ain't got the get-up that our new sheriff has. Me and him got together on this and we deserves a lot of credit."

"You're welcome, judge," says I, "and all that goes with it."

JUST then here comes old "Jay-Bird" Whittaker, who owns the Cross J cow outfit and two-thirds of the banks in Yaller Rock county. The judge ain't partial to Jay-Bird, so he lopes off down-town.

Jay-Bird gets off his bronc and sets down with us.

"Look upon me," says he sad-like. "Take a good look. Good! Do I look changed? Do I look haggard around the gills? Yeah? I deserve to—gol dingle danged if I don't! Me and 'Chuck' Warner went to Silver Bend to see the sights. *Sabe?* We seen 'em. That gol-danged, horse-faced, prevaricating son-of-a-sea-cook and me got stewed! I don't remember all of what passed but I seem to hear talk about Buffalo Bill, Antelope Doc, P. T. Barnum and Frontpaws.

"Well, I woke up with my feet sticking out over the top of a manger, and in my checkbook is a stub which shows that I, J. B. Whittaker, who ought to have at least enough sense to make me half-witted, had paid five hundred dollars for the sole ownership of Oswald's Dog and Pony Show!"

"Bought it?" asks Magpie foolish-like.

"You hard of hearing, Magpie?" asks Jay-Bird.

"Is she a good show?"

"I never looked—gol dang it! Chuck said I ought to be thankful that I didn't buy the Mastadon Carnival Company too, which has been showing there a couple of days. Maybe I'd a bought it if I'd a been seen by the owners. Dog and pony show! ——'s bells!"

We all rolls smokes and just about that time here comes Hassayampa Harris of Curlew, who owns the banks that Jay-Bird don't. Him and Jay-Bird is what you'd call business rivals. Hassayampa squints down at Jay-Bird and shoves his hat off a heated forehead.

"Think you're smart, eh?" he grunts sarcastic-like. "Buying things, eh? Going to put yourself up as another Buffaler Bill, eh? Going to start a Wild West Show, eh? Well, I spiked one of your wheels, old-timer."

"Yeah?" says Jay-Bird. "Who told you?"

"Chuck." Hassayampa grinned from ear to ear. "I got him loaded and he spilled it all to me. Don't blame Chuck, Jay-Bird, 'cause he was too full to think what he was doing. *Sabe?* He told me all about what you bought and why you came home after more money."

"Oh!" grunts Jay-Bird. "He told you, did he? What did he say I came here after more money for, Hassayampa Harris?"

"Haw! Haw! Haw! For why, eh? Haw! Haw! Haw! I beat you to it, J. B. I bought the Mastadon Carnival outfit myself."

Jay-Bird looks at Hassayampa for a moment, and then falls right off the steps.

"Some shock, eh?" grins Hassayampa. "Maybe I should have told him more easy-like."

We turned Jay-Bird over on his back and he's laughing so danged hard that his jaws are almost locked. He ain't

able to talk for some time. After a while he shuts off the tears and looks at Hassayampa.

"Chuck told you that? Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Hassayampa sets there, fooling with his six-shooter and staring at Jay-Bird's tears; then he swings his bronc around, abrupt-like.

"Where you—Haw! Haw! Haw!—going?" asks Jay-Bird.

"I'm going to kill Chuck Warner. He lied to me!"

"Kill him a few times for me, Hassayampa," yells Jay-Bird. "He never told me the truth in his life."

Clang! goes a bell. *Bang! Bang!*

"Dirty Shirt is drunk," opines Magpie.

"As usual," nods Jay-Bird. "Are you going to be active in the celebration Tuesday, Magpie?"

"Ain't decided yet. I'm going to let Ike help 'em out. Feel it's my patriotic duty to let 'em have a little assistance."

"Magpie Simpkins," says I, "me and you are pardners in material things, but when it comes to my soul you don't own a share of stock. You ain't going to loan me and I ain't going to have no hand in anything. *Sabe?* I'm going down-town right now, and if you hear my old .41 talking out loud you'll know that brotherly love has snuck up on me and I'm playing safe. Good-by!"

If we had a newspaper in Piperock, you'd likely see something like this:

The follering guests registered at Holt's hotel today:

"Piegan" Peters, "Tombstone" Todd, "Ace-High" Anderson, "Dynamite" Davidson, "Calamity" Calkins, "Sad" Samuels, "Windy" Wilson, "Shiner" Seeley, "Slow-Elk" Sloan, "Ornery" Olsen, "Hip-Shot" Harris and others too ornery to mention.

Every danged one of them are practising horse-thieves. Brotherly love don't mean nothing to that bunch, unless the brother owns some middling good stock.

Then I meets Dirty Shirt. He's about six and seven-eighths drunk and he greets me more with his eyes than his tongue. He squints one eye at me and then holds out his six-shooter for me to shake hands with.

"Comp'ments of the sheason to the Harper twins," says he serious-like. "By cripes, Ike, your brother looks more like you than you do. Fact."

"Which one, Dirty?" I asks and he rubs his eyes.

"Ex-coosh me! My mishtake, I'm sure. You folks goin' to shelebrashun? If so—why not? All three nods together. Good!"

"Anything going on up-town, Dirty?"

"Naw! Pete Gonyer and 'Slim' Hawkins are up in Holt's hay-mow nursing a pair of Winchesters, while they makes out schpecifications for tug-of-war.

"'Mush be amachoor,' says Slim. 'Stric'ly amachoor.'

"'Amachoor what?' asks Calamity. 'Horsh-thieves,' says Slim.

"Now everybody's sore, Ike, 'cause they're all professionals. Why, there ain't 'nough amachoor horsh-thieves around here to tug the hat off your head."

Just then Magpie shows up with two saddle-broncs and a hurry-up expression on his face.

"Get on, Ike," says he. "Hurry up!"

I gets on that horse and follers him. That's the trouble with me; I'm a born follerer and no questions asked. We thunders through Paradise like Paul Revere advertising a flood, and I don't overhaul Magpie until his bronc begins to miss a step here and there.

"Magpie," says I, "let's stop and fight."

He yanks up his tired bronc and stares at me.

"Stop and fight?"

"Uh-huh. I'm just as big a coward as you are, Magpie, but I won't run no further."

"There ain't nothing to fight, Ike."

"You didn't think I'd stop if I thought there was, did you? What in the devil are we killing our broncs for, I'd lower myself to ask?"

Magpie rolls a smoke and loops one long leg around the horn of his saddle. When Magpie appears to get confidential I feels that life is but a fleeting flower.

"IKE, me and you has scrabbled mighty hard for existence, ain't we? We've punched cows for forty a month, prospected everywhere and found nothing much, and we run the sheriff's office with a gun in one hand and our life in the other, ain't we? What have we got? I

asks you as man to man, what have we got?"

"We've got between five and six hundred dollars in the Silver Bend bank," I replies.

"We did have, Ike. We did have a measly amount like that. How far will a amount like that go, I asks you? As old age sneaks upon us, Ike, and our hands lose their cunning we need to be upholstered in worldly goods or go to the bone-yard."

"Has somebody robbed that danged bank?" I gasps.

"I hope not, Ike. I wrote a check for five hundred and gave it to Jay-Bird, so I ain't worrying."

"The —— you did! What for, Magpie?"

"For the complete and entire ownership of Oswald's Dog and Pony Show, which will be knowed in the future as Simpkins' Stupendous Shows Combined."

"Combined with what?" I whispers.

"I don't know yet."

I don't say nothing more. I look at him—that's all. I hope to die if I didn't want to kill my pardner. I swallers hard and scratches the butt of my six-gun.

"I knowed you'd choke up with e-motion, Ike," says he, reaching over to pat me on the back. "It's a thing that only comes once in a man's life, and I knowed it would make you happy. Opportunity knocked and I sure let her in. Come on, Ike, and we'll make P. T. Barnum's outfit look like a medicine show. Why, dog-gone it, Ike, we can run that outfit one season and clean up enough to let us loaf the rest of our lives."

"Barnum was right," I whispers. "He sure was."

"You danged know he was," nods Magpie. "He knew."

"One every minute, Magpie, and no stop-watches on earth."

I don't know nothing about circuses. My folks got all their money honestly, and I don't know a blood-sweating Behemoth from a ant-eater, but it don't need zoological wisdom to see that me and Magpie owns a lot of undesirables.

First on the list cometh Cleopatra. Magpie has a book which I read once, and it says that Cleopatra showed up on the Egyptian range about one hundred and seventeen years before Christ, but after I looks her over I comes to the conclusion she ain't that young.

Cleopatra is a man-eating tiger, but from the looks of her ribs I'd say that she ain't mixed with men folks for a long, long time. Her teeth look like she'd been trying to get sustenance from stones. She might pinch but I'll be danged if she could bite.

Then comes Allah. He looks like a antique rug that the moths had been living in. They say a camel can go eight days without drinking, but I'm betting Allah can go longer than that without eating. He's what I'd call a shipwreck of the desert.

Then comes Alcibiades. This critter might 'a' been a elephant years ago, but right now he ain't much but a mass of rubber wrinkles and a pair of mean little eyes. Alcibiades sure needed washing and ironing.

The pony end of the outfit consists of four little pinto ponies, and the dogs tally about six mongrels, one mixed breed and one just dog. There's two monkeys which scratch like lumberjacks. There's a dirty tent, two painted wagons, a bass drum, a bale of hay and a set of harness.

With these few words I have proclaimed what we own for five hundred dollars. Oh, I forgot to mention a water-bucket minus the bail. I'm looking over our loss when Magpie comes back, grinning like a fool.

"Eighty dollars, Ike!" he whoops. "We own the whole layout now. The Simpkins' Stupendous Shows United."

"Eighty dollars for what, Magpie?" I asks.

"Mastadon Carnival Company, Ike. Hassayampa knowed there was no use bucking me. We own everything now."

"Except brains," says I. "What does the Mastadon consist of?"

"Why—" Magpie scratches his head—"I'll be danged if I know. Must be worth eighty dollars. It ain't reasonable to suppose——"

"Figuring comparative prices, Magpie, you must have got an extra water-bucket for the eighty. What is a carnival, Magpie?"

We ain't far from Judge Mulligan's

office, so we went over and borrowed his dictionary. It said that a carnival was a time of riotous excess.

"My gosh! We've bought a riot, Ike!" exclaims Magpie.

"Not me," says I. "Don't blame me. I've had a riot wished upon me."

We didn't get paralysis of the eyelids looking at our purchase. If the dog and pony show was small, the carnival was the sharp end of nothing whittled to a point. There's three small tents badly in need of canvas to hide the bare poles. One of 'em has a sign proclaiming it to be—

SONG BIRDS FROM THE SUNNY SOUTH

Inside is a platform and some benches.

"Them birdies has gone south, Magpie," says I.

The next tent proclaims to be the abode of—

THE PEARL OF EGYPT, THE POETESS OF MUSCULAR MOTION, DIRECT FROM THE SULTAN'S HAREM

It's as empty as a last year's coyote den and smells like a muskrat burrow.

At the next tent we meets the last survivor. It sets there gnawing on a hunk of bread and don't pay much attention to us. I never seen such outright hair on any human being. His head looks the same from front and back, and all he's got on is the collar and sleeve of a dirty shirt and a skirt of swamp-grass. The words "water" and "bath" sure was a dead language to that *hombre*.

"Just about who in —— are you?" asks Magpie.

The feller looks up at us, masticates a few times and then points at a dirty sign on the tent.

BOSCO THE WILD MAN. HE EATS 'EM ALIVE

"Run out of snakes?" I asks and he nods.

"Where's the rest of the layout?" asks Magpie.

Bosco stuffs the rest of the bread in his face and swallers hard.

"Well, the boss said he was going home; the niggers said they was going back to making beds in Pullman cars, and I heard that the Pearl of Egypt left here with a sheep-herder."

"You the sole survivor?" I asks and he nods.

"Yep! Know where I can get a job?"

"Job!" snorts Magpie. "I bought you, feller. Cost me eighty dollars."

"You got stung," states Bosco. "I ain't got a snake left."

"You really a wild man?" I asks.

"Well," says Bosco sad-like, "I ain't been paid for two weeks, and they left me stranded here without no clothes, so you can draw your own conclusions."

NEVER since the Lord dumped the leavings of the Bad Lands and wrote in the big book, "They will call this Piperock," has the old moon looked down upon the like. Into the old cow-town, at five A.M., drags the darndest conglomeration a human ever conceived. The Simpkins' Stupendous Shows Combined drifted into Piperock. It was Magpie's idea. I wanted to take the things the other way, but Magpie wanted to give the old-timers the treat of their lives and Magpie usually has his way.

Magpie drove the team, which hauled dogs, monkeys, tent-poles and so forth. Then came Bosco on Alcibiades, leading Allah, and behind them cometh Ike Harper driving four calico ponies hitched to a tiger's cage, inside of which Cleopatra yowled and complained against alkali, rheumatism and lack of sleep. We led our broncs and left 'em at our own shack as we came past.

We pulled around behind the city, unhitched, unloaded and then laid down on a part of the Pearl of Egypt's tent and went to sleep. When we wakes up we observes Scenery Sims looking over our outfit.

"What is this here mess and what you fellers aiming to do?" he asks.

"This?" asks Magpie surprized-like. "This is Simpkins' Stupendous Shows Combined."

"Yes? What you aiming to do with it?"

"Show her off in Piperock tomorrow. She's some attraction, Scenery."

"Belong to you, Magpie?"

"Feathers and everything!"

"Then," says Scenery, "you better hire somebody to haul it away and bury it."

"Think you're funny, don't you?" asks Magpie. "Get this inside your barren skull, little one: This is a cross between a circus and a carnival and tomorrow she helps to entertain the old-timers. *Sabe?*"

"Smells like a cross between a pole-cat and ancient eggs," says Scenery. "Remove it from our fair city to once!"

"Away from here? What do you mean, feller?"

"I'm running this celebration." Scenery pats himself on the chest. "Me and Judge Steele inaugurates same and we has the say-so. *Sabe?* We adjudicates against anything that ain't our own doings. In the first place, you ain't got nothing that attracts us, and in the second place, as the sheriff, I rules against what you have got. You can't show in the city of Piperock while——"

I saw Alcibiades working closer and closer to Scenery, but I didn't think it was any business of mine to warn the law. It was nice team-work between Alcibiades and Cleopatra, if anybody asks you. The elephant just wrapped its trunk around Scenery, slammed him up against the cage and he don't no more than hit the bars when a pair of paws come out and shucks the lower half of Scenery plumb to his birthday suit.

Then Alcibiades cracked the whip with the sheriff, and when he lit twenty feet away he still retains his boots, shirt and an idea of the general direction home.

"Good work!" applauds Bosco, sticking his head out from under the canvas. "Things like that never happen in a carnival."

"You hang around here very long, Bosco, and you'll see a lot of things what never happen any place else," says Magpie.

We've just got one tent up when here comes Judge Steele. He hauls out a sheet of paper, balances his glasses on his nose and reads:

"To whom it may concern or annoy:

"Be it knowed this day and date that the city of Piperock, according to the laws of the State of Montana and the rights of humanity, does here and hereby announce to all and sundry, that on the fifth day of August, being tomorrow, there will not be tolerated within our sacred precincts anything of the circus nature. Be it further knowed that the city of Piperock does not hanker for anything of like nature and will not tolerate same. This aforementioned city is aiming to play safe for once, and no questions asked.

"Signed by Lindhardt Cadwallader Sims, sheriff, and wrote out by Judge Steele, notary public. Amen."

"Is there anything else that Scenery wants?" asks Magpie.

"He said something about a pair of pants, I believe."

Just then cometh Tombstone, Ace-High, Slow-Elk and Hip-Shot. They stops and considers Alcibiades and then wanders over to us.

"That ultimatum ain't hardly square, judge," complains Magpie. "Me and Ike has expended a enormous amount of time and capital on this stupendous aggregation of wonders and we've done it all that you might have a enjoyable day. It has cost us a e-normous amount of wasted energy, and in the event that we can't exhibit here we are broke, busted and worn to the bone."

"Who says you-all can't show off here?" asks Hip-Shot.

"It has been so adjudicated by the sheriff," states the judge. "I wrote her out and I know there ain't no loop-holes in same. Scenery has decreed that this circus ain't going to show here, and I represents his feelings."

"No circus, eh?" says Hip-Shot. "I pines for a circus. How about you fellers?"

"Like a calf for its maw," agrees Slow-Elk. "I ain't never seen no circurious, Hip-Shot, but since you spoke I've begun to hanker awful for one. Let's have one."

"It must be so," nods Hip-Shot. "We'll have her."

"You might talk to the sheriff," says the judge.

"Talk ——!" grunts Hip-Shot. "Come on, Slow-Elk."

They pilgrimed away and the rest of us sets down and rolls smokes.

"I just wants to know," says Ace-High nervous-like, "I just wants to know if there is anybody here except me and Tombstone and the judge and Magpie and Ike? Five is maybe all that is here, but I feels that I'd like to be sure."

"Much obliged, Ace-High," says Tombstone. "You've got more nerve than I have. Is it or ain't it?"

"Gents," says Magpie, "meet Bosco, the wild man. Eats snakes."

"I could love you, feller," says Ace-High, "love you for being flesh and blood. Danged if I didn't think my sins had began to react upon me."

"Feeling so good I ain't got the heart to chide you," says Tombstone, "but if I was you—well, this is a he-man's town, Bosco, and all that, but we've still got some of the finer feelings left, so I'd advise you to get some pants."

When Slow-Elk and Hip-Shot shows up again, Hip-Shot bows low to us.

"Proceed with your circus," says he. "All is well and good."

"You saw Scenery?" asks Magpie joyful-like. "What'd he say?"

"Not much," grins Slow-Elk. "He said to hang on to them keys, 'cause there ain't no more like 'em, but he spoke too late."

"I throwed 'em down that hole where Wick Smith bored for water," said Hip-Shot.

"Keys to what?" I asks.

"Cell door and the jail," grins Slow-Elk. "Scenery is bottled up."

The old judge gets up and shakes out his coat-tails.

"Do you mean to say that our estimable sheriff is locked in his own jail?"

"I pass on the 'steamable part, judge," grins Slow-Elk, "but you sure guessed the last of it to a gnat's eyelash. Let's all have a drink on the sheriff's impossibilities."

THEN we enters Buck's place. The rest of the surrounding country is in there and they're enjoying the fulness of the world. Wick Smith is standing on the bar orating, and we listens to his wau-wau. Wick has been dallying with the weaving water, and his voice is full of silv'ry bells:

"—And friends of old, I says to thee all, there may be cities of gold and silver and palaces of paradise personified, but when a feller hankers for a pat on the back and the grasp of a honest hand and——"

Wick happens to glance down at Bosco and seems to run short on vocal power. He stares at Bosco for a moment, lets his glance wander to the ceiling, shuts his eyes tight and proceeds—

"As I said before, when a feller hankers for a hat on the back and the hasp of a—a——"

Then he glances down again.

"Judge," says he, sliding off the bar, "you talk a while. I—I reckon my innards are ailing, I reckon."

He weaves out of the door with his eyes shut.

Bosco looks around at that assemblage and then walks out the back door. Wild men has feelings the same as regular folks, I reckon, but to everybody outside of about six of us Bosco is the limit in hooch hallucinations.

"I'd—I'd set 'em up," says Buck weak-like.

Six of us faced the barrier but the rest shook their heads. Dirty Shirt took his under advisement. He walked to the door, rung the bell three times, and joined us.

"It may get me e-ventually," he announces, "but I'm still firm in my left hand, folks."

All to once Wick stumbles back inside and flops in a chair.

"Send for Doc Milliken!" he yells.

"Ailin', Wicksie?" asks the judge.

"Terrible!" Wick looks around, wild-like. "Ain't nobody going to send for a doctor?"

"Will a little liquor take out the hurt?" asks Slow-Elk.

"Liquor ——! I need a antydote! First I see a cannyball and then I see a danged woolly dog!"

Wick's voice hits a high note, and he stares at us wild-like.

"He seen a dog!" gasps Dirty Shirt. "Wick Smith has seen a dog! My gosh, this is terrible!"

"Woolly dog," says Wick, like he was talking to himself. "It had a stick in its hands and was walking like a man. When it seen me it hopped up in the air and turned over and lit on its hind feet and——"

"Snakes!" gasps Yuma. "Smitty has got crippled crawlers!"

"You're a liar!" howls Wick. "Don't I know a dog from a snake?"

"Grab him before he gets violent!" yells Big-Foot and makes a dive for Wick. Wick might have been sick in the head, but it hadn't affected his legs. He beat Big-Foot to the door and neither

of 'em hit the sidewalk on their way out.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" whoops Judge Steele. "Them darned fools don't know——"

Big-Foot comes backing into the door, catches his spurs on the threshold and falls flat on his back, where he lays with his eyes shut.

"Take it away!" he yelps. "Dang it all, take it away!"

"You—you got 'em too, Big-Foot?" asks Buck.

"Hawg tie me!" yells Big Foot. "I seen more than Wick did!"

"Somebody has been monkeying with the circus, Ike," whispers Magpie.

We ducked out the back door. Bosco is setting there on the canvas. He says a couple of the dogs got loose, but nothing else is gone.

We sat down and smoked a while, when Magpie says—

"Bosco, do you know anything about this circus of ours?"

"You ain't got no circus," says Bosco. "I seen this aggregation when she was at her best and she wasn't worth a whoop."

Magpie nods and considers Alcibiades.

"What good was that elephant? He didn't travel on his looks, did he?"

"Him? Naw! They used to give him soft rubber balls to throw into the audience—if there was any audience. Oswald never played to capacity."

Magpie picked up a stone about as big as his fist and walked over to the elephant. He held out the stone and Alcibiades took it. He seems to sort of take a good hold with his trunk and then swings it back and forth, like he was weighing it. Then he whirls his trunk up and sideways, lets out a little grunt and away went that rock.

Crash!

It bored right into the eaves of "Old Testament" Tilton's shack about fifty yards away. We hears the crash and a moment later here comes Old Testament out of the door.

He's got his hands folded and we can see his lips moving. Over one ear is a lump the size of a egg.

"Howdy, parson," says Magpie, but Old Testament don't hear nor see us. As he walks past us we hears him singing soft and low—

"Rockavages clef'—rockavages cl'—Rockavages——"

Then he shakes his head and starts all over again.

"He can't get over the rock!" says Magpie, awed-like, and we watches the old preacher turn into the street out of our sight.

"Magpie," says I, "this here circus is getting in bad. You can do a lot of things around here, but any time elephants start hitting preachers with rocks, it's going too far. I feel within me that there's going to be a reaction."

WE sets down to consider things, when here comes Yuma, Wick and Big-Foot. They're sneaking along like they was afraid we'd fly away. Yuma has a sack in his hand, while the rest of 'em packs guns. They stares down at Bosco and contemplates deep-like over our wild man.

"You—you're the snake-eater the judge told us about?" asks Yuma.

"I am," says Bosco. "Eat 'em alive! Greatest sensation of the age! Scientists has pondered over my marvelous powers to withstand the bite of poison reptiles. Yessir, I am Bosco! I eat 'em alive!"

"You sure must be a awful handicap to the snakes," opines Yuma. "You've got St. Patrick beat, feller. All he done was chase 'em. You eat pizen ones?"

"Always! The flavor of poison is vanilly to me."

"Not rattlers?" says Big-Foot. "Not them spotted devils?"

"Rattlers? Ha! Ha! Ha! I love 'em. I'm sorry I haven't any left, gents, but I ate the last one day before yesterday. I suppose I've got to go back to eating ordinary food."

"Rise up and cheer!" says Yuma joyful-like, holding up the sack. "You sure get banqueted, feller. In this sack is a ol' diamond-back with sixteen rattles and a button. Fat as a fool and you gets him free gratis for nothing."

"A-a-a-alive?" gasps Bosco.

"Betcha! Ain't even bruised nor shy a button. Me and Big-Foot caught him under the sidewalk. He's a humdinger. We'll watch you eat him."

"Wait!" yelps Magpie. "You fellers think I'm running a free show? This

layout costs me money and I only lets Bosco eat snakes after you has paid one dollar per each to see the feeding. *Sabe?*"

"If we furnishes the eatables?" asks Yuma.

"You can't noways furnish what you don't own, Yuma," states Magpie. "That snake is part and parcel of nature, and you can't own one unless you raises same from your own stock. *Sabe?* That snake don't belong to nobody, so you might as well give it to me."

"This snake?" asks Yuma, holding up the sack. "This belongs to ——" Alcibiades has edged over close and when Yuma holds up the sack, he just reaches over, wraps his trunk around it and yanks it away. Alcibiades begins swinging that sack back and forth, playful-like.

"Look out!" yelps Magpie. "He's going to throw it at somebody!"

Wick was wise enough to gallop straight away, but Yuma and Big-Foot seemed to think that height was salvation. They bounces straight for Cleopatra's cage, being as that's the highest thing at hand, and they begins to claw their way right up the bars.

That cage wasn't built for no such a stunt, and when they're about halfway up the side Cleopatra lets out a woful wail and slams herself up against the bars. The cage sways for a second and then over she comes off the wagon, and two perfectly unreliable horse-thieves and a antiquated tiger bite the dust together, with the horse-thieves underneath.

Allah was almost in the way of the crash and the next thing we know our shipwreck of the desert gets the stampede fever, too, knocks me and Magpie flat into a tangle of canvas and poles, and away he went into the desert. His two humps weave in different directions as he gades away, and it reminds me of two drunken punchers riding double.

Bosco took a high-dive the other way, and I sees him setting there on the ground, investigating some cactus he dove into.

Me and Magpie gets our breath and sets there looking at each other, when here comes Judge Steele, Pete Gonyer, Art Miller, Doughgod Smith and Old Testament. They groups near us and the judge clears his throat.

"Magpie Simpkins, Ike Harper *et al.*: We, the sober and industrious citizens of Piperock, has gathered in serious conclave this day and date and has adjudicated that we will not have the glorious morrow sullied or marred by a circus or circuses.

"In the name of the parties responsible for Old Home Week, I hereby delivers this here ultimatum: Get your danged circus hence! We are not empowered to arrest you and have no jail to lock you in if we were, but we still got ropes and willing hands. We've got enough to cope with tomorrow without dry nursing denizens of the jungles. For once in its glorious existence Piperock is playing safe. *Sabe?* This here is our final——"

"My ——!" interrupts Pete. "Looky!"

The tiger cage begins to rise up and them ultimatumers backs into a compact body and pulls their guns. Then out comes the remains of Big-Foot. His hat is smashed down over his eyes but he don't care where he goes.

Then out comes Yuma. He don't seem to see us. He tips his hat over one eye, does a few fancy jig steps and then reaches in under that cage. Then he straightens up and away he goes, dragging Cleopatra by the skin of her neck.

Cleo has had the shock of her old age but she's still alive. She spits and slaps, but Yuma goes merrily on his way ahead of a cloud of dust made by a grandma tiger which is digging deep into her soul for sounds to tell us how exasperated she is.

This conclave of indignant citizens stands there and gawps at the free show, until—

Swish!

Alcibiades whales away with that sack and hits the old judge right in the back of his neck. He lands on his hands and knees but skids back to his feet.

"Who hit me?" he wails. "Who threw that?"

Z-z-z-z-z-z-zee!

The string had come off the sack and right at their feet coiled the rattler, indignant as thunder over things in general.

"Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Wow!" yelps Doughgod.

The monkey cage must 'a' got busted up in the fracas, 'cause just then a mangy little member of the missing links hopped from a wagon-wheel and lit on Doughgod's shoulder. Doughgod stiffens like he was hanging on to a electric battery and then lets out another whoop and tries to buck the monk off. Doughgod collides with Old Testament and the two of 'em goes down in a heap.

"Make it a good one," says Magpie and kicks the staple out of the lock on the dog cage.

Doughgod and Old Testament got up just in time to trail the others and lead that yelping bunch of mongrels away from us. Then we flops, weary-like, down upon our canvas again. Magpie slips his gun loose and shoots the head off that snake, which is hunting for a place to hive up under our tents.

"Five hundred and eighty dollars, Magpie," says I. "She's going fast."

"Yes," he admits, "she's fading out, Ike. The Simpkins' Stupendous Shows is about scattered. Nothing left but a snake-eater and a elephant. Sorry you missed your meal, Bosco."

"My ——! Did you think—I—say, that snake still had its fangs!"

"Oh!" says Magpie. "I see. You—you sort of commit suicide with a empty gun, as it were, eh?"

"As it were," nods Bosco. "I'm going away from here pretty soon. I ain't got nothing to wear, no place to go and nothing to ride upon."

"There's lots of places to go," says Magpie, "and you can ride that danged elephant if you want to."

"Like ——!" says I. "I'm going to have something out of this. I'm shy two hundred and ninety dollars, Magpie."

THEN cometh old Judge Steele and Yuma. They've got a white rag on a stick. Yuma is half out of clothes and they both seem chastened in spirit. They halts fifty yards away.

"We come more in sorrow than in anger," states the judge. "Sorry we didn't kill you fellers early this morning. Which of you deplorable jassacks is the tiger-trainer?"

"I wash my hands of the tiger," replies Magpie. "I may have Yuma arrested for stealing it but that's all."

"It's in the saloon," says Yuma, bowing apologetic-like. "Buck is in there and so is Old Testament, and we ain't heard from them for quite a while."

"Half-Mile's bronc is in there, too," adds the judge. "Half-Mile roped it and then fell off his bronc as it went into the door."

"Gosh!" grunts Magpie. "I feel sorry for the bronc."

We walks down to the flag of truce and like a pair of danged fools we let 'em get the drop on us. They takes our guns and throws away the flag. Then they prods us down in front of the saloon, where all of Piperock stands or mills around. They gives us three cheers—we already had a tiger.

"Now," says Judge Steele, "we've got these *hombres*. Wick, you hold the watch. Now we're going to give you *hombres* just five minutes to get your danged tiger out of our late friend Buck Masterson's place of business."

"Late?" asks Magpie. "Is Buck late?"

"Well," says the judge, taking off his hat, "maybe I was a bit hasty in that statement but I will say this much: He's danged tardy."

"Old Testament is tardy, too," says somebody in the crowd.

"One minute is passed," states Wick.

"The consequences is what?" I asks.

"Your case is parallel with horse-stealing," states the judge.

Magpie looks at the crowd and grins.

"You horse-thieves suffering any to speak of?"

"Two minutes gone," reminds Wick. "You know best."

"Can I have a gun?" asks Magpie, but the judge shakes his head.

Magpie tightens up his belt and spits on his hands.

"Come on, Ike!"

I wonders at the time what Magpie spits on his hands for. He sure wasn't afraid the tiger would slip through his hands. Cleopatra was awful old and old age naturally makes her childish and cross. Reminded me of that poem about the woman who knew by heart from finish to start the book of iniquity. Cleopatra was that kind, I reckon.

We pilgrimed up to the front door, but all is still.

"You better go around to the back door, Ike," whispers Magpie.

"Speak up loud!" says I. "What you trying to do, sneak up on her? Why should I go to the back door, Magpie? We don't want to catch her, do we?"

"Three minutes gone," drones Wick.

Magpie turns to the crowd and takes off his hat. "Feller citizens, I regret I have only one tiger to die for."

Then he opens the door.

We walks in like Daniel into the lions' den or Joner into the whale. The bronc is plain and visible, standing between the pool table and the wall, with the reins looped around its feet. The card-tables are upset and the place shows that there has been a certain amount of action.

Sudden-like, up behind the top of an unset table come the head of Buck Masterson. He squints at us and his Adam's apple bobs up and down like it was practising to hop out the first time he opens his mouth.

"Howdy, Buck," says Magpie. "How's each little thing with you?"

"Tut-tolable," says he hoarse-like. "Just barely so, so."

"Where's the tiger?" I asks and Buck's eyes get round as nickels.

He's so scared he can't speak for a minute; then he whispers:

"Uh-under me! I can't let loose!"

"Still alive?" asks Magpie.

"I—I don't know. It ain't moved for a minute. My ha-hands are paralyzed from squeezing the blasted thing!"

"Get up easy-like," advises Magpie, "and then jump back."

"I—I may do it," whispers Buck.

He takes a breath, eases his feet under him and then jumps high and handsome. He falls over a chair, bumps his head against the bar and collapses on the rail.

"My ——!" he wails. "That was a close shave!"

Then up comes a tangle of green cloth off the card-table, mixed with a striped blanket. It rises to the height of a man and instead of the roar of a man-eating tiger comes these words—

"Let us all arise and sing hymn number sixty-seven."

The cloth falls away. He stands there, hands folded, and on his face is the look of a man who has made his peace and don't care what happens.

Buck gets to his feet and weaves forward.

"Tut-testament," he quavers. "I-I'm sorry I ch-choked you."

"Take a front seat, brother," says Testament. "All sinners are welcome."

"Five minutes are up," states Wick Smith's voice.

"Go to thunder!" yells Magpie. "Everybody's all right. There ain't no tiger in here."

I felt sorry for that poor bronc, so I goes over, untangles the reins from its feet and led it out of the door. The crowd splits to let us out and just as we gets out of the door somebody yells.

I whirled and looked back. From the saddle-horn runs a rope back into the saloon and she sure is pulled tight. Somebody slaps the bronc and Cleopatra came among us. I reckon she must 'a' been behind the bar. She came out of the door, ducked behind the crowd like a flash and the next second about thirty citizens of Cowland are tangled with our tiger.

I SLIPPED the rope off the horn and let nature take her course while I took mine—around back to the remnants of our circus. Bosco is there. Some of that gang must 'a' lost a quart of hooch, 'cause I finds Bosco trying to reach a point where he can see snakes that he don't have to eat. I takes it away from him and charms a few for myself.

There's a lot of noise around on the street but I ain't curious. Alcibiades stands there like a rubber statue. He sure was about the laziest elephant on earth. Then cometh more noise and here comes the mob, Magpie in the lead, and around his neck is a rope.

I starts to explain things to 'em and I got a rope too. Bosco tried to hide but they roped him from several directions to once.

"Rope the elephant and you'll have the whole works," says I.

"What will we do with 'em?" asks Yuma. "There ain't no trees."

"It ain't exactly a hanging matter," states the judge and I could love him for them words. "They ought to be in jail —blast 'em! If Scenery only had some way to get out and——"

"He will," states "Ornery" Olsen.

"'Dynamite' Davidson and 'Calamity' Calkins went down there a while ago and they said they'd get him out or kill him in the attempt."

"Where is the tiger?" I asked.

"Dead!" snaps Wick. "Seventeen men fell on her and she died of old age!"

"I've got a scheme," yelps Pete Gonyer, "a dinger of a scheme. Let's rope 'em on to the elephant and take 'em to jail. Have pe-rade, eh?"

There wasn't any need of a vote. It was unanimous. Even me and Magpie and Bosco voted "aye." Jail looked like a happy hunting ground beside of all these ropes and tree talk.

Alcibiades looked on, mean-like, during the roping. Magpie was in front, then me and then Bosco. Somebody tied a rope to the elephant's trunk and then we strung out like a cross between a funeral and a pe-rade. It sure attracted a lot of attention. Then we hove in sight of the jail.

There is Dynamite and Calamity, busy at something. Dynamite is on his hands and knees, while Calamity stands over him. Beside Dynamite is a wooden box with the cover off. Just then they rise up, sort of hurried-like, and see us.

Alcibiades ain't had nothing to eat for so long that I reckon he hankered for the contents of that box and he don't stop when the rest of the pe-rade does. The rope slips off his trunk and we stopped against the jail wall.

"Look out, you danged fools!" yelps Dynamite. "Get away from there!"

The crowd stampedes a little ways but Alcibiades don't move, and we can't.

"Ain't you got no sense?" wails Dynamite. "That fuse is only three feet long!"

We looks down and under the corner of the dobie wall is a spitting fuse. We hammers Alcibiades but he don't respond.

"Get away from there, you danged fools!" whoops Calamity.

"Don't talk English—talk elephant!" yells Magpie. "We hear but can't heed."

Swish!

Alcibiades whirls his trunk sideways and we sees a stick of dynamite whiz right into Judge Steele's stummick. The judge lit all doubled up, and the crowd gasped audibly.

"Too bad," says Magpie. "They won't always go off."

Alcibiades digs into that box and roots out another stick.

Swish!

The next stick sailed high over the crowd and we watched it drop out of sight behind Pete's blacksmith shop.

Bang!

That one went off. We seen a wagon-wheel hop up and roll off the top of Buck's place and a lot of horseshoes scatter around over the house-tops.

The next one was a line shot at Wick Smith's wood-shed, but that one didn't bust. The next one did. Alcibiades just gave it a nice little toss, and she busted behind the crowd, causing some to go prostrate.

"Good boy!" says Bosco, and then Alcibiades picks up the rest of the powder, box and all. Everything is as quiet as a graveyard and we hears Old Testament say—

"In the midst of life we are in——"

Swish!

Up went the box of dynamite straight for the crowd, and just then Magpie throws himself sideways on the elephant, and the rest of us has to foller suit. We're about half-way down the side of that elephant when Dynamite's blast goes off. I'd plumb forgot that blast. I'd say that Dynamite knowed how to use powder, 'cause the whole corner of that jail moved out to meet us. It knocked Alcibiades down but he got right up. He's so thick-skinned that nothing could hurt his feelings.

I can't hear a danged thing. I look out at the crowd. Most of 'em are still prostrate on the ground, but I can see the dynamite box, so I know she didn't bust. The ropes has slipped and we are no longer on top of the brute. I'm hanging on the side like a pack-sack; Bosco is draped over its rump and Magpie has one leg over its neck, while the rope holds him under the other knee, and he's hanging on to the elephant's ear with both hands.

Out of the ruined side of the jail comes an apparition. It is covered with dobie dust and great wonderment. It weaves up to us with both hands in the air.

"Don't shoot!" it squeaks. "I give up!"

"All right," nods Magpie. "Don't shoot, boys; they're dying."

Maybe Alcibiades was shocked, too; maybe he had acquired man-eating propensities from associating with Cleopatra, but anyway he whirled, let out a mean *Hur-r-r-r-r-rump!* and started after Scenery Sims. Scenery ducked straight for the crowd, and Alcibiades follered him like a bloodhound. We went some.

WE didn't go very many miles per minute, but we went awful strong. We went through Wick Smith's yard and we took two clothes-lines full of clothes with us. We got so tangled up in washing that we didn't know where we went. Every one who took the time tried shots at us but we ignored such trifling things.

I managed to get a suit of flannels out of my eyes in time to see our animated vehicle pointing straight for the door of our horse stable. The door is too narrow for elephants, being as we only had horses in mind when we built it, and I starts to yell a warning but the flannels came back and shut me up.

Comes a ripping jar, the snap of a rope and I hit the earth with Magpie on top of me. He got up, dazed-like, and shut the door.

"We've got him, Ike," says he.

Crash! Rip-p-p-p! Smash!

The front logs of the stable goes squeegeed, and from the rear comes the rattle of falling logs and a cloud of dust. We limps to the corner. Out of the cloud of dust comes Alcibiades and on his back is Bosco. The elephant skids to a stop, whirls and points straight into the desert.

"Bosco!" yelps Magpie. "Good-luck! Look out for snakes!"

Magpie stares at me and then at the ruined stable.

"I—I wonder if Bosco really did eat them snakes?" he asks foolish-like.

"He—he did," states a voice, and out from the squeegeed doorway pokes the hairy head of Bosco. "He sure did, gents. I am the only original snake-eating——"

He stops and rubs his hand over his eyes. He looks all around and then whispers—

"Which way is the city of Piperock?"

Magpie points toward the town.

"Sure?"

"Sure. Why?"

"That's a —— of a question to ask," says Bosco, and we watches him blend into the mesquite, going away from Piperock.

"That must 'a' been Scenery on the elephant," says Magpie awed-like. "Scenery must 'a' lost his clothes in the crash."

"Speculation has ruined a lot of men," says I. "Why stop to speculate?"

We saddled our broncs and we didn't hit the main road until we're in shooting distance of Paradise. Then we turns a corner and runs slap into Jay-Bird and Hassayampa. They're packing just enough to feel glad. They hands us a bottle.

"You fellers going to the celebration?" I asks.

"You betcha," agrees Hassayampa. "Looking forward to a *hyiu* time. How's the circus?"

"Only thing of it's kind on earth," says Magpie between swallers. "Piperock is going crazy over it."

"Bet they are," agrees Hassayampa. "Piperock deserves it. Don't want to sell out, do you?"

"Sell it?" asks Magpie. "Hadn't thought of such a thing. Who wants to buy it, Hassayampa?"

"It ain't worth no more than you paid for it, Magpie," says Jay-Bird, "but we'd pay that much, eh, Hassayampa?"

"Pshaw!" grunts Magpie. "I just got started, gents."

"You ain't got no use for it, Magpie," says Jay-Bird. "Me and Hassayampa can afford a circus better than you and Ike. We'll pay you back in the same checks you paid us, eh? Is that a go?"

"As you said, we can't afford it," nods Magpie. "We'll trade."

Magpie puts the checks in his pocket. We take another round of good cheer and ride on.

"See you at the celebration," yells Jay-Bird.

"If you've got second sight," nods Magpie, and we pilgrimed straight for Silver Bend.

We ain't done nothing wrong in selling out. Believe me, that money sure looked good. I wondered if Hassayampa

and Jay-Bird had gone crazy, but Magpie said if they hadn't they soon would.

WE got into Silver Bend after dark and hived up in a hotel. We're so sore and tired that we don't wake up until noon. Magpie opines that we better draw our money and go over to Powder River for a spell, so we pilgrimed down to the bank.

The curtains are down tight, and on the door hangs a card printed in big letters:

TO TRUST IS TO BUST.
TO BUST IS ——.
NO TRUST,
NO BUST,
NO ——.

A feller comes along and stops beside us as we read the sign.

"The cashier runs away with the contents," says he, "and she's busted flat. They may pay ten cents on the dollar in a year or two."

Magpie twists his mustache and stares at me.

"Hassayampa and Jay-Bird knew that," he snorts. "The danged crooks knowed them checks wasn't no good, Ike!"

"What did we know about the circus, Magpie?" I asks.

He looks at me, scratches his head for a moment and says:

"Piperock ought to be glad, Ike. Don't you know it? They ought to rise up and sing a song of thanksgiving and vote us a medal."

"What for, Magpie?"

"To think we didn't buy out P. T. Barnum."

Which we hope Piperock appreciates.

DREAMERS' REST

By CAPT. GEO. WARBURTON LEWIS

I KNOW a nook beside a tropic sea,
Whose spell still chains the hungering heart of me;
Where palms their welcome wave,
And nature begs to slave,
And one may dream in daytime—glory be!

It is a spot where salt smells from the deep
Invade each chink where nature drones in sleep,
And, worn by life's stern test,
A man may take his rest,
Unharried by the urge to sow or reap.

A wondrous purple carpet everywhere
Of fronds that from the palms have fallen there,
Mottled by light of sun,
Spreads bronze and golden dun,
And fragrance as of incense fills the air.

Beneath those palms I've roamed at mellow noon;
By that green sea the mystic midnight moon,
With cynic smile and smirk,
Has made my soul to irk,
Fond homing resolutions to impugn.

My hopes are anchored by that tropic sea—
My life is being lived there; though I be
To wanderlust a prey.
Ten thousand leagues away,
Its spell still chains the hungering heart of me!

Gentlemen of the North

A four-part story—conclusion

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Red Belts," "When Kentucky Starved," etc.

CHAPTER X

LE BORGNE PLANS A FEAST

I HAVE met many savage chiefs, but none who ranked with Le Borgne for brutality, implacable will-power and wisdom. Not only among his own people did he rule with autocratic decisiveness and exhibit the power of an absolute monarch, but among the Mandans also his word was law. His great courage, his imperturbable calmness in the stress of danger, made him an ideal leader against the Sioux and other hostile tribes. In any disputes between the Minnetarees and their Mandan neighbors his promptness in acting the arbiter with a big war-ax made him supreme.

Despite his high quality of courage and imminent capacity for leadership, he was, from the white man's point of view, bestial with his women. They were his chattels and of no more account than his dogs. If he were so inclined he would murder them, and no one dared question the act. He had slain more than one of his wives. He went even further and appropriated any matron or maid that took his fancy, and this without protest from husband or parent, an acquiescence I never found in any other Indian community.

I knew much of his character by reputation and from the Pillager's gossip. What details of his grim history I lacked I soon learned during my stay in the village.

Choke-Cherry brought the word in the morning that Flat Mouth and I were wanted by the chief. The Pillager, to make himself fit for the audience, strung his Sioux scalps round his neck and went naked except for his breech-clout. We left our weapons in the hut with Miss Dearness, except that Flat Mouth concealed a small knife in his clout. I counted the scalps on his chest and was relieved to find he carried only the Sioux's hair. I asked him in Chippewa, as we stood at one side, what he had done with the Assiniboin scalps, but he smiled and said nothing.

Miss Dearness bore herself well, although she had passed a miserable night pacing the hut and making, as her woman attendant fully believed, some very powerful medicine. Flat Mouth and I had found quarters in a hut near-by and had joined the girl with the first light. Now that she knew we were to meet Le Borgne she was deeply troubled. Old Choke-Cherry never would have surmised it as she paced from one side of the big hut to the other, her hair towering in a fiery mass above her proud head.

"I send good thoughts with you," she murmured after following us to the door.

"You have all of ours," I assured her. "Don't be afraid. If an American can't help an English girl he must have very weak medicine."

Flat Mouth caught the last word and gravely told her:

"The white woman's medicine makes me feel very strong. I can throw a buffalo bull when her eyes watch me."

She forced a smile and we left her.

On entering Le Borgne's hut Choke-Cherry accompanied us only to the door. We found the chief seated at the left and facing the fire-hole, gravely contemplating his medicine-log. He sat on a couch raised a foot from the floor by willow mats and several heavy robes. On the cottonwood log before him stood two skulls of buffalo bulls, decorated with red earth. These were his greatest treasures, personifying his *manito*.

Behind the log hung his weapons of war and the chase, and the trophies of battles, such as scalps.

He was alone, having cleared the hut of his women in anticipation of our coming. He turned his head as we entered and I was hard put to maintain my composure, for over his sightless right eye was a white patch. He continued swinging his head, and in the boring gaze of his left optic I found enough fire to more than make up for his half sight.

Like all the Minnetarees he had an extraordinary beak for a nose. His big mouth was further widened by a habitual grin, his permanent expression. When he was pleased he grinned. When he was consumed with rage he continued to grin.

That Choke-Cherry stood in fear of him was shown by the fashion in which the old rascal poked his head inside the door to see if anything was wanted and then ducked back. I stood in advance of Flat Mouth. Le Borgne's first words to me were—

"Ho! I like white men."

The Pillager interpreted this over my shoulder. Le Borgne's lips writhed and twisted over his big teeth as he sought to give his smile an amiable cast. From his medicine-log he took a long-stemmed, redstone pipe and filled it with Missouri tobacco. Lighting the stuff, he took a whiff and puffed it toward the heavens and passed the pipe to me and motioned for me to sit beside him. Flat Mouth squatted on his heels beside me to translate the chief's words. Our host began:

"I like white men. They bring me goods. We trade with the Spaniards through the Cheyennes and southern tribes when we are not at war with them. They say you come from a big white chief on the Assiniboin, who is to send traders here."

"We come to make the road smooth for our traders, who will bring many goods and guns," I replied.

"They say the daughter of the big chief comes with you. They say she comes to be my wife."

With an effort I controlled my voice, making it careless in tone as I responded:

"The white woman is a medicine-woman. She can not marry. If she did marry her medicine would kill her and her husband."

His brows drew down as he cogitated this, but his smile continued. Being on his right side, it was necessary for him to turn his head to look at me. The effect was curious when the white patch slowly moved to one side to allow his sound eye to study me. Without commenting on my disclosure he said:

"They say your Chippewa is a very brave man and will live with my people. He has been here once before. We did not know then he was such a great warrior."

The Pillager spoke up haughtily, announcing:

"Eshkebugecoshe, the Sioux-Killer, has driven all the enemies away from the land of his people and now looks round for a brave people who need him in making war. They must be very brave. They must be at war with the Sioux. I come here with the medicine-woman. After I have gone with her to her father I will come back and see if the Minnetarees are good fighters."

He fingered his necklace of scalps lovingly and stared boldly into the smiling face of Le Borgne.

The Minnetaree gazed at him fixedly for some time, possibly speculating on the advantage and disadvantage of having such a pronounced fighter in his village. Shifting his gaze back to me, he asked—

"You are *Bosheittochresha?*" (men who bring black cloth—English).

"*Manceechteet*" (long knife—American) I corrected.

"You work for the English?"

"I work for the big chief, father of the white medicine-woman," I replied.

"Your people are cowards."

"They are the bravest of the brave. They can come out here and eat you up."

He laughed aloud and mocked—

"And yet you work for the English."

"Because they want very brave men. The chief of the Pillager Chippewas works for me. Why? Because I need a very brave man."

He ceased laughing aloud and pondered over my words, seeming to find them logical, for he nodded his head slowly as if in indorsement. Then he abruptly demanded—

"Is she your woman?"

"She is no man's woman. She can be no man's woman."

"Why is she with you if she is not your woman?"

"Her medicine helps me make good trades for her father."

"Why does she come here if not to be my woman?" he puzzled, his grin now quite ghastly.

"Her medicine made my road smooth in coming here. The northern Indians know her and run away when she is angry. The Sioux grow blind when they see her hair."

This engaged him in thought for some minutes, for, although one of the greatest of the plains Indians, he was yet a savage and a victim of his superstitions.

"Is her medicine stronger than my *manito?*" he asked, nodding at the buffalo heads.

"Much stronger," I promptly assured. "If she wanted to become your wife your *manito* would be jealous. Your *manito* would fight with her medicine and would be killed. You would die when your *manito* died."

Again he was silent, his one eye focused on the two skulls. Then he threw up his head and said—

"Let us see this mighty white woman."

He called out and Choke-Cherry bounced in, his fat face alive with fear. The chief ordered him to go and bring Miss Dearness.

I affected a composure I was far from feeling. Flat Mouth's hand rested on his hip near the little knife hidden in his clout, while the war-fires sprang up in his small eyes. While we waited, Le Borgne ended the silence by saying:

"I lost a wife while on the hunt. She was young and good to look at."

"She died of the bad cough?" I politely inquired, knowing many of the Indians were suffering from it.

He shook his head and the terrible grin widened and showed his teeth far back.

"She is not dead yet," he said. I was nonplussed and was searching for some intelligent observation when he enlightened me a bit by adding: "She went to live with a young man."

I decided from his low chuckling that he accepted her infidelity very philosophically. He remarked:

"I look about for another woman to take her place. They say the white woman is not like any woman ever seen in the Indian's country."

Flat Mouth's hand touched my arm, but I had already heard the sound of a light foot at the door. Choke-Cherry threw the door open, and the girl entered. Her sleepless night had left an unusual pallor on her face. She wore her *capote* like a hood and looked like a nun as she advanced. I rose and stood beside her.

LE BORGNE turned his head, tilted it and for fully a minute glared into her white face, his grin tightening and growing more wolfish. She met his gaze steadily, staring at him as if she were looking through him and not at him. With a snap of his strong teeth he muttered:

"She is very white. I never saw one like her. I never knew women like her lived. Where is her medicine-hair?"

As the Pillager interpreted the girl hesitated, then, catching my side glance, she threw back her *capote* and allowed the glory of her hair to show. A shaft of sunlight from the small window opening back of the chief intensified the effect.

Le Borgne dropped his redstone pipe. Although he still grinned, his big mouth was agape as he looked. Rising to his full six feet, he slowly approached her. She did not wince nor move, and red and white fought the ancient battle of lust and denial for twice sixty seconds. Then the chief gingerly extended his fingers to touch her hair where the sunlight made it spun-gold. Her eyes narrowed ominously. I darted out my left foot and disturbed the balance of one of the buffalo heads. The noise caused the chief to turn in time to see the skull gently rocking. I was staring at the girl as if oblivious to the phenomenon.

He drew back his hand and rubbed his chin, studying the skull. Plainly his *manito* was jealous and was warning him to keep his hands from the strange woman. He glanced from the painted skull to the blazing eyes and sun-crowned head of the girl. Then he retreated to his robes, picked up his pipe and summoned Choke-Cherry. When his brother entered Le Borgne gave him an order that caused Flat Mouth to frown.

Addressing Miss Dearness in Chippewa, the Pillager said:

"He says for you to go. He said something in another tongue I did not understand."

"I have my knife," she murmured.

"You are perfectly safe," I spoke up in English. "The Pillager and I are still here. We will take you away very soon. Remember, you must not show any fear."

Her head went high, and she gave me a smile as she bowed to Le Borgne and followed the waiting Choke-Cherry. Le Borgne forgot his pipe in staring after her; then he asked me—

"Why do you come here and bring no presents?"

"The white woman's father will send many presents. He said it was foolish for me to bother with a few. We were told to come and ask you to tell where our trader is to live. Then we were to return very quick. The Cheyennes are better robe-makers than the Minnetarees, as they use beads and porcupine-quills, but they are south of the Missouri and the white chief does not want to go below the river."

"No trade can cross this part of the Missouri unless I say it can," informed Le Borgne. "The Cheyennes are bad. They would not put presents under the stem and make peace with us. I will carry the pipe against them soon. I will call a council of my old men and give you an answer about your trader."

He rose to terminate the interview.

"We are in great haste to go back. Can the council be held today?" I asked.

"Soon — today — another day — sometime."

It was useless to seek to improve this most unsatisfactory reply. Rugged and conscienceless, inexorable in moods, thoroughly self-dependent because of his brute strength, the man typified the muddy river which was even now carving new channels for itself and clawing banks and cottonwoods into its swollen waters. Just as the very country seemed to possess a savage personality unlike the Red River country, so did this savage despot differ widely from our northern chiefs. When he stood up to dismiss us I supposed his act was a bit of perfunctory courtesy. Not so, nor would it have been in keeping with his egotism. He proposed to walk with us and, as we set forth, he picked up a heavy war-ax and idly swung it by its rawhide thong.

The Pillager glanced at the ax and shifted to the man's blind side, and I noted my friend carried one hand gracefully on his hip, near the haft of the hidden knife. Walking thus between us, he kept up a running fire of comments upon the white men, whom he said he loved as brothers, and added some mild criticism of the absent H. B. agent, at the Mandan village, whom we were to oppose, but never once did he refer to Miss Dearness. I grew uneasy, thinking he intended to proceed to the guest hut. Did he do that, I should look for his savage whim to prompt him peremptorily to demand possession of the girl. To my great relief he halted when some distance from the hut and, stepping aside to a porch, informed—

"The wife I lost is in here."

He did not request us to tarry, but as we walked on we glanced back. He stood in the doorway, loudly calling his woman by name. She did not appear and he entered the hut. We halted and saw him emerge, dragging a woman after him. Wearing the same grin and moving as deliberately as if lighting his pipe, he struck the poor creature over the head with his ax, and she fell lifeless in front

of the hut of her lover. Then, swinging his ax by the thong, the chief calmly walked back to his hut, with never a backward glance at the pitiable shape he had murdered.

"—— him!" I whispered, weak and sick.

"He is very bad," grunted the Pillager, his fingers twitching nervously at his girdle in search of the ax he had left beside my gun. Had he found it, I have no doubt but what either the Minnetarees or the Pillager Chippewas would have lost a great warrior. In a minute he had a grip on himself and was stoically saying—

"We have the white woman to think about."

So we went on while the curious slowly gathered, while the relatives of the murdered woman timidly removed the remains. Nor did I hear a voice raised against the assassin, nor witness a single gesture of rage. The tragedy taught me a world of truth as to the man's merciless character and unlimited power. He had no more compunction about taking the woman's life than he had in killing a buffalo. Then and there I knew Miss Dearness must follow one of two paths were she to escape him; death, or a play upon his superstitious fears. Superstition, the curse of the ages, the mighty barrier to human progress, now became a blessed thing. It was a chink in the armor through which the bloody devil might be reached.

The Pillager was in no wise so deeply concerned as to Miss Dearness' fate as I. He firmly believed the girl's red hair was a mighty medicine. While eager to do a man's work in rescuing her, he was upheld by knowing her *manito* stood by to help her. Wishing to regain my composure before meeting the girl's sharp eyes, I turned aside and proposed a walk toward the river.

"The village is very still. The killing has frightened them," I remarked.

"It seems still, as no dogs and children follow us," explained the Pillager.

FOR the first time I observed we were left undisturbed. No children swarmed about us with their impish tricks and amateur larcenies. No dogs rushed out to mangle us. We had Le Borgne to thank for this much. Even though he murdered a woman, he was invariably hospitable to white men.

As we passed the hut where the two Assiniboins had died I asked about them, and Flat Mouth said they had been secretly buried in one of the empty corn-cellars. The village as a unit took it for granted the Cheyennes had sneaked in and killed them. It was hoped to keep the news of their death from their tribe until Le Borgne could bring about a peace with the Cheyennes, or call in a large war-party of his old allies, the Crows.

"The knife they found by the bodies was a Cheyenne knife," gravely added the Pillager.

"I saw you talk with the Cheyenne chief, but I did not see him give you the knife," I said.

"He is a very brave man. His brother is a medicine-man who knows much magic. When we leave the village for the Red River I will stretch their hair on hoops."

"Throw them away!" I urged. "If they should be found we will all be killed."

"I have promised them to the Cheyennes. A Pillager chief does not keep the hair of dogs, but to throw them away now would show I was afraid. That would spoil my medicine. I will make old Tabashaw grunt when I sing my new song."

The scalps were another danger added to our list. Did the Minnetarees so much as suspect the Pillager was the slayer there would be no mercy shown him. Even a Sioux was safe if he succeeded in entering the village. What happened to him when he started for home was another matter. However, it was useless to argue with the Pillager. As profitable to ask a fanatic to forsake his religion as to expect an Indian to do what he believed would spoil his medicine.

"We must get away tonight," I said.

"Le Borgne said something to Caltahcota in the Crow tongue. I could not understand it," mused Flat Mouth, halting and staring toward the river.

"What has that to do with our getting away tonight?"

"Who knows? My *manito?* If so he has not told me. Perhaps the Medicine Hair knows. The buffalo head in Le Borgne's hut could tell if our ears could hear."

His words made me uneasy. I pressed him to speak more literally, but he persisted in remaining silent. He had strong doubts as to our immediate departure. Le Borgne's aside to Choke-Cherry, spoken

in the Crow tongue, was behind his doubts, although he had not caught the war chief's words. I decided I did not need to walk farther and turned back to the village. A group of men approached and turned aside in a desire to avoid us. One of them I recognized as being prominent in the fiasco at the Cheyenne camp. I asked Flat Mouth to name him.

"He is Aharattanamokshe, or Chief of the Wolves, the oldest son of Caltahcota."

"Speak to him. Let us learn how the tribe feels toward us. If Le Borgne feels friendly, his men will show it."

Flat Mouth greeted the young man pleasantly and asked some questions. Chief of the Wolves stared enviously at the scalps on the Pillager's breast and was very respectful in his attitude as he replied to the queries. After an exchange of a few sentences the warrior turned back to his companions while we resumed our walk to the village.

"I asked him if the men went to swim," explained Flat Mouth. "He said the Minnetarees are such great swimmers they will go to the Missouri and not to the Knife when they wish to swim. Then he told me they went to look for willows and small cottonwoods."

"You should have asked him if the people think the white woman's medicine had anything to do with the Cheyennes' refusing the treaty, and if he said 'Yes,' you should have told him it was a lie. Choke-Cherry has told his brother the white woman is to blame for the Cheyennes' riding away."

"They go to find willows and small cottonwoods strong enough to use in making a new hut," said Flat Mouth.

"That is stuff for women and children to listen to," I said.

"There is much to be found out when they talk of making a new hut," said the Pillager. "Who is to live in it?"

I waited and as he kept silent I was forced to ask:

"Well, what did you find out? Who is to live in it?"

"They did not say. But no new people have come to the village except a white man, a brave Pillager Chippewa and a mighty medicine-woman."

"By heavens! They build the hut for us. They expect us to stay here!" I cried in English.

My emotion gave him his cue, rather than any knowledge of English, although he was able to pick up words here and there.

"They let men sleep in the big hut or where they will," he said. "A new hut means a new wife for a big chief. I have said it. Let the white woman use her medicine now if she would go back to the Red River."

His frankness left me nonplussed and frightened. I rallied finally and managed to make light of the warning. Le Borgne was a wise man. If his Indian nature would permit him to defy the medicine of the girl—and this I could scarcely believe—his astuteness would restrain him from killing what he believed was a chance for a permanent post in the village. The great advantage of having an N. W. trader constantly supplying him with arms and ammunition would greatly outweigh his lust for a woman, whether she be red or white. War came first; women next. I spoke this aloud and told it over to myself. The Pillager listened and watched me closely. Then he spoke, his words exploding all my false hopes:

"Le Borgne is not like other Indians. He has his own way more than other chiefs. He thinks his *manito* is very strong—stronger than any other *manito*, for has he not always had his own way? When he wants anything he is like a child; he wants it and can think of nothing else. He killed a woman before our eyes. Many chiefs would be afraid her people might try to wash out her death with his blood. But he wanted to kill her; he could think of only that.

"He believes the white woman's medicine is strong, but he believes his is stronger. If he takes her to a new hut as his woman he will show that his *manito* is stronger. Then he will boast he has tamed her medicine and that it will work for him. With the two medicines working for him he will believe the big white chief we have told about will be glad to build a post here."

"I'll shoot him before he shall take the woman!" I gritted.

"I am chief of the Pillagers. It is my right to wear two eagle feathers in my hair for every enemy I have scalped in battle. It is through me the white woman's medicine will work," he haughtily retorted.

WE TALKED no more but hurried back to the guest-hut, for I was foolish enough to think my presence might protect her. The door was open, which surprized me, as Miss Dearness was quick to close it when we went out. We entered and I called her name. Our two guns and ammunition stood where we had left them, but the girl was gone. That she should attempt to walk about the village was unthinkable. I snatched up the gun, made sure it was loaded, and would have dashed out, had not Flat Mouth seized me by the arm and cautioned:

"Walk softly. Wait for me."

He slipped on his robe, slung his bow and arrows over his shoulder and picked up his gun. Then he circled the hut and spent some moments at the skin couch before the fire-hole.

"We kill much time," I impatiently warned.

"Is this medicine talk for you?" he called back.

I joined him and he pointed to some words scrawled with a charred stick on the rocks forming the rim of the fire-hole. The message read:

They take me to another hut, they say. Find me, American.

I read it to Flat Mouth, who was highly pleased with this proof of the girl's power to communicate with me. But when I would have commenced a precipitate search he restrained me, saying:

"We shall get an ax stuck in our heads. The white woman will be left with her medicine to fight alone. It is no time to run like a badger after game. We must be the fox. Le Borgne will kill us if we hurry."

He stood before me, his powerful form blocking my path until I had regained an appearance of composure. Then, nodding in approval, he stepped aside for me to pass. As we reached the door I paused and filled and lighted my pipe to show my lack of concern. This was well played, as Flat Mouth quietly informed me two men, spies, were watching us from the porch of the next hut. By an effort I forced myself to laugh, and the grim features of the Pillager took on a smile. We sauntered carelessly from the hut, the Pillager murmuring:

"She is still in the village. Le Borgne would place her in his brother's hut, I think."

This was logical, and in a roundabout way we finally arrived at Choke-Cherry's abode. The old villain was seated on the porch, puffing mightily to make his Missouri weed burn in his long pipe. Several of his women were removing some earthen pots and copper kettles to the next hut. I expressed concern for his difficulty in getting a smoke and generously gave him an inch of tobacco and waited for him to fill and light up. Flat Mouth touched my elbow. I turned and, under a pretext of addressing him, observed the direction of his staring gaze. He was looking intently at the wall of the hut. Taking my time, I discovered a piece of bark hanging on the wall. On it was writing.

To Choke-Cherry, through the Pillager, I said—

"Where did you get the medicine that drives evil spirits away?" And I stepped closer to the writing.

Between puffs the old reprobate proudly said:

"It is very big medicine. It will bring me many ponies. It will keep the spotted sickness (small-pox) from my hut."

I scarcely heard the Pillager's translation, for I was reading:

I know the worst. It shall never happen. The woman tells me in the sign language there is to be a big feast in two days. Don't run any risks for me. You have done too much already. I am very brave. It will not be hard.

"A very good medicine," I said, stepping back and feeling the cold sweat standing on my forehead. "But it is the woman part of the medicine. There is a man part that makes it whole. I will give you the man part because you are the brother of the mighty chief and will open his ears to what I say about a trading post here."

While the Pillager told him this, I picked up a bit of charcoal from a dead fire and rapidly wrote:

It shall not happen. Be ready tonight. We can do nothing in the daytime. If not tonight, then tomorrow night. Remember, it shall not happen.

Then to the deeply interested Choke-Cherry I explained:

"The medicine is now whole. When the sun is overhead take it inside and hang it over the place for medicine."

As it was near noon I knew the girl would

soon see it. I had not ventured to call out to the girl and address her, as her writing hinted at a command for silence from Le Borgne.

We leisurely continued our stroll until we were at the hut of the chief. Like his brother he was outside enjoying the sun, his one eye gleaming evilly. The Pillager and I stood our guns against the upright of the long platform, now loaded with driftwood, and I greeted the chief with an amiable smile and produced my tobacco. Taking his pipe, I filled and lighted it and sent a puff toward the heavens. Handing it to him and recharging my own, I said—

"When the white man's post is here the greatest of all war-chiefs will smoke good tobacco all the time."

He sucked in the smoke with huge content, but eyed me suspiciously for a moment. Turning his head aside so only the dead eye showed, he remarked:

"The white woman asked for a new hut. She said her medicine was cold where she was. My men will build her a new hut. Until it is ready she will live in the hut of my brother, Caltahcota, who has moved his wives and children to another hut."

"The big white chief will thank you with many presents for your kindness to his daughter," I warmly assured. "His friends told him to build his post among the Sioux but the woman's medicine told him to build it here. The post will make the Minnetarees the greatest and strongest of all Indians so long as they do not wrong the white chief."

"I will brain the man or woman who touches his goods," declared Le Borgne, toying with the ax he had so recently used in murdering the woman.

"He will come soon with many white men and many guns," I added.

"Why does he bring many men and many guns when he comes to his friends?" asked Le Borgne, jerking his head about to bring his one eye to bear upon me.

"Because he brings many presents and much goods, and knows the Assiniboins would kill and rob a small party."

The chief smiled and frowned, his one eye glowing like a demon's.

"The Assiniboins are dogs," he softly muttered. "Two were killed by Cheyennes in this village last night. The Cheyennes are very brave men. They have fine horses. My brother was a fool not to make peace with them. He says the medicine of the white woman spoiled the peace."

"He lies. He was afraid his brother, the big war chief, would be angry with him for his foolishness. He tries to blame it on the woman."

He did not resent my blunt characterization of his brother and continued:

"He was a fool to hold the Assiniboins when they came to the camp. They had come to the village and left it. After they left it any one could kill them. They are dogs. My brother should have taken the ten ponies for them. I have offered a wife, three horses and a hundred skins for one of their ponies, and they would not trade."

"If the white woman's medicine is not made angry, it can get you many Cheyenne ponies," I said. "I will see her and talk about it."

"She says she wants to be alone," he replied, swinging his left eye about and darting a challenge at me.

"If she says it, it is so. Those who make her medicine angry will surely follow the broad trail to the west, where stand the many huts of the dead."

"She asks to be my woman," he announced, his right hand dropping on the handle of the big ax.

"If she asks it, it is good," I managed to reply; but only the fact that my gun was beyond my reach prevented me from blowing the devil's head off. "But if you take her for a wife and her medicine says 'No!' then the Minnetarees will name a new war-chief in your place."

"Ho!" he rumbled, rising and folding his muscular arms across his broad chest. "A medicine-man tells me my *manito* is stronger than hers. It shall be a fight between them. If my *manito* is a liar, or a coward, or weak, he will be whipped. But while they fight I will have the woman, a mystery woman, a woman with hair like red fires."

As the Pillager interpreted this, it was only his bearing that sobered me and kept me from insanely jumping for my gun. His cold face showed the utmost unconcern. After he'd finished repeating the chief's boast he stepped close to Le Borgne and taunted:

"Fool! An evil spirit draws you to your death and you do not know it. I, chief of the Pillager Chippewas, wearer of many

eagle feathers for the men I have scalped in battle, say it. An evil spirit, sent by the Sioux's great *manito*, tells you to take the white woman. So be it."

Le Borgne's smile twisted his lips convulsively, and for a moment I believed he was to grapple with my friend. But Flat Mouth's boldness appealed to him. The warning about the Sioux *manito* laying an ambush and baiting him with the girl also registered deeply.

"You are a brave man," he said to the Pillager, "or you would be a dead man under my ax. I love brave men even when they are my enemies."

"I am not your enemy. I tell you the truth. That makes me your friend," said Flat Mouth.

"You shall stay to the feast I give after two sleeps. Then you must go away, for the Minnetaree village is too small for two brave men. The white man may stay, but you must go."

"And be followed by your warriors, who will try to kill me after I get away from the village," sneered Flat Mouth.

"No!" passionately cried Le Borgne, and I was convinced he spoke sincerely. "Le Borgne, the Blind, will never wish to kill the Sioux-Killer. Go and kill more of our enemies. After another snow come to me and smoke some of the trader's tobacco. Today there is a little cloud over the sun. Sometime it will go away and we shall feel warm toward each other."

WE LEFT him, having learned for a certainty how much time we had in which to work. On the surface the case seemed hopeless. The girl was isolated and not permitted to see us. We might kill the chief and a few others, but we could not expect to fight our way clear of the village. The Pillager would consider it an ideal exit to go to his happy hunting-grounds in defense of the girl's medicine. We were three sentenced to death, and death it must be after two sleeps, unless a miracle rescued us.

As we skirted the village and gave ourselves to thought, I found death to be very impersonal. It meant nothing to me beyond a keen disappointment. There were so many things I had intended to experiment in and to accomplish before I died. The adventure had opened up a desire to know more about the girl. Destiny had purposed that I should succeed, else why had she come into my life? Then there was my disappearance from the Pembina post. Would the truth ever be known, or would the gentlemen of the North write me down as a deserter? Would any thieving on Black Chabot's part be blamed on me? Altogether, an abrupt finish would leave many loose ends which an orderly fate would have gathered up. The grim irony of it all, that I, a Northman, should perish by the ferocious fancy of a savage chief!

"My friend's face should be filled with sunshine," grunted Flat Mouth reproachfully.

I simulated a genial expression and looked up to find the reason for his warning. Chief of the Wolves and his friends were returning from the river, and with them rode an Indian on a pony whose appearance testified to rough and fast travel. He was the center of the group and the target for many queries. As they drew abreast of us, the horseman noticed Flat Mouth and stared at him and his string of scalps and talked hurriedly with Chief of the Wolves. Then he jumped from his pony and ran to us, seizing the Pillager's hand and shaking it warmly, crying:

"They say you are the Chippewa chief who killed the Sioux. They say the scalps you wear came from Sioux heads. Your name is heard throughout the Sioux country. The Sioux chiefs call you a great warrior and make medicine to get your skull as a drinking-dish. I, White Snake, a Minnetaree and their prisoner, heard them tell these things."

"I am a mighty warrior," readily agreed Flat Mouth. "The Snake's medicine was strong to help him get away."

"I have been with them for many moons. I went to hunt buffalo with them. Then runners came with stories of what they had seen. The hunting-party broke up, and I got away."

Chief of the Wolves now impatiently reminded:

"My uncle, the Blind, is waiting for you to bring him a talk. It is not good to keep him waiting."

"The White Snake brings good news?" asked Flat Mouth, as the escaped warrior turned to mount his pony.

"Strangers come. It is good or bad,"

retorted the Snake. "My medicine let me get away while the Sioux were riding to meet the strangers. If they are friends of the Sioux they will come here to kill us."

Chief of the Wolves ran ahead and looked back, and the Snake remembered it was not good to keep Le Borgne waiting. The Pillager and I ruminated over the man's story. There did not seem to be much to it. The Sioux were much excited over some strangers. The Snake had failed to reveal who or what they were. My first thought was of some formidable war-party from the far south. Flat Mouth disagreed with me, insisting the Snake had said nothing to suggest fear or warlike preparations on the part of the Sioux. If it had been a war-party the scouts would have brought word to that effect. After we had argued it back and forth without getting anywhere he dismissed it by simply stating—

"It is the medicine of the white woman working to let her go free."

Such was his faith in the girl's powers that his black eyes glittered with hope and he walked with a springy, confident step. He had thrown aside all cares and worries. Being an Indian, it was good logic, for what is the use in believing in medicine and good luck if your faith fails to help in an emergency? Only I did not possess the Pillager's childlike trust. We two men were the chosen instruments for liberating Miss Dearness. Her medicine was as strong and resourceful as we were and we were helpless.

"Eshkebugecoshe, there is but one way. I will go to Le Borgne's hut tonight. While I am there you must get the girl from the hut, take her to the corral, get ponies and ride north to the Missouri."

He promptly shook his head in refusal.

"Where will my white brother be if I do get the girl away?"

"I will follow you."

"The trail you will follow will lead far from the Missouri. Even if I, chief of the Pillagers, could do this thing, the Medicine Hair would not. It is poor medicine you plan to make. The white woman's *manito* is strong enough to let us all get away. We will wait. The feast is not for two sleeps. Many things can happen in two sleeps."

His optimism did not cool off the little hell in which I lived. Desperation often begets a ferocious courage. Then there is such a thing as finding great relief in learning the worst. I was impatient to have the climax over with. I wanted to take my double-barreled gun and make an end of the situation by sending a heavy buffalo charge through Le Borgne's head. A new situation would instantly bob up, but it would have the virtue of being different from the present horror. Flat Mouth slipped his arm through mine, as if fearing I might race off and do something rash. As he induced me to walk back to the village, he talked softly, saying:

"If her medicine grows weak we will go down like brave men, taking her with us. To strike now would be as foolish as to lay an ambush and then shoot at the first warrior to approach it, instead of waiting till the game was well trapped. Wait! My *manito* whispers that many things will happen if we wait. Would Le Borgne sell the white woman?"

"We have nothing to trade," I sullenly reminded. "He wants guns, but we have none. He is bad."

"He is a great warrior. He wants the white woman for his wife. Why shouldn't he? My white brother would take her as his wife if he could."

HAD he struck me in the face I could not have been more startled, for his confident assertion instantly set strange fancies in motion. I pictured a home-loving woman, busy with domestic tasks, wearing the wonderful hair of Miss Dearness and glorified by the happiness of wifehood. The contrast between this picture and her probable fate was appalling. I strove in vain to dismiss it.

During all our perils no sentiment had had time to lodge with me. Each hour had brought new hardships and dangers, and we were rushed from one dilemma to another with the stage ever set with climaxes. It was grotesque that now, in the supreme peril, I should hark back to the tantalizing mood which was responsible for my seeking her up the river. Her manner of caressing my hand had not encouraged soft thoughts. It was simply her way of thanking me. From the beginning it had been difficult to imagine her in the rôle of a sweetheart, although her peril accentuated her womanliness.

"Buy her from Le Borgne," continued

Flat Mouth, ignorant of the turmoil he had stirred up within me.

"With what?" I angrily countered.

"The white robes. They are very big medicine with the Minnetarees. Even Le Borgne does not own five such as you have, down in the Mandan hut. The skin of the calf is worth more than the big robes to these Indians. They believe a white calf-skin is mighty medicine."

Here was the nucleus of an idea. In the white robes and calfskin I held a value equivalent to many hundreds of skins—to many ponies. It was such a trade that was seldom, if ever, offered to a Minnetaree. Ordinarily it required a syndicating of property to purchase one robe. The bargain was made as soon as suggested to an ordinary war-chief. He not only would sell a prospective bride, but he would throw in all his wives and daughters for good measure.

But no one could ever foresee what Le Borgne would do. His tenacity of purpose, especially in his lusts, would not stay him from murdering a kinsman, if such a homicide be necessary to his gaining the woman he fancied.

Still, it was an idea, a possibility. To begin with, he was a savage; therefore he possessed many simple traits. He was subtle and cunning; he was childishly direct in his technique; he was a mass of contradictions. At times the devil couldn't guess his mind; again he was transparent as rain-water.

He lived with whims and usually surrendered to his moods. If his mood required astuteness, he stood head and shoulders above the average savage. If it required the simple reaching forth and taking, a dog after a bone could not be more precipitate in action and obvious in purpose. If his yearning for good luck, as symbolized by the robes, should outweigh his animalism, he would sell the girl. If his lust for her was the dominating thought when I came to make a trade, all the white robes on the plains would fail.

I do not think the idea revived my hopes to any great extent, but I did lose something of my melancholia, of my fatalistic belief that the girl and I had found death in coming across the Côteau du Missouri.

Now whether I would have experienced even this slight change of heart if the Pillager's idea of the robes had not been preceded by the suggestion that I wanted the girl for myself, I can not say. At that time I do not even know that I wished her for my wife. She was too marvelous and fascinating to be relegated to any one plane. She was wonderful and seemed to stand aloof. She was one to keep a man's mind topsy-turvy, did he think of her fondly.

My *manito* knows I had had scant time for soft imaginings from that moment when she broke through the bushes on the east side of Red River and I began my efforts of helping her to escape. I needed a clear head to see the thing through. I must think only of Le Borgne and his moods. But should one picture her in love, what a tornado of passion his fancy would be compelled to paint. She was not a half-way woman. She was all ice or all fire.

"RIDE to the Mandan village and bring the robes. See they are wrapped securely so none will know what they are," I commanded as we entered the village near the corral.

"Little birds sing in my ears and tell me our medicine is making," said the Pillager as he brought his pony from the corral.

Some Indians gathered around us, and Le Borgne strode through the group, his one eye gleaming questions, his wide mouth twisted sardonically.

"The great chief of the Chippewas goes out to kill more Sioux?" he asked.

"He is tired of staying penned up in the village," gravely replied the Pillager. "He will ride out and look for signs of an enemy war-path. The Pillager Chippewas never wait for their enemies to come to them."

Le Borgne's smile persisted, but there was murder in his eye as he caught this taunt. Speaking very low, he said:

"After the big feast, when I have had the white medicine-woman for a wife, I will go with the Chippewa, and we will see who will ride the farthest in search of the enemy, and who will kill the most. We shall ride so far and fight so hard that one of us must die in battle before the other can come back. My village is not big enough for two such men to return to."

"Le Borgne is a great man, but he is not a Pillager Chippewa," Flat Mouth insolently retorted, springing on his pony.

Le Borgne ever loved a brave man. If he had any religion besides the usual Indian belief in good and bad luck it consisted of a worship of courage. Therefore Flat

Mouth's insult raised him in the war-chief's esteem.

"Don't get killed so you can not go on the war-path with me," he warned.

The Pillager waved his hand and galloped toward the north. I knew he planned swinging east and crossing the Missouri at the mouth of the Knife, risking an encounter with any loitering Assiniboins as he made for the lower Mandan village. He courted grave hazards in pursuing this course, but I could appreciate his desire to leave Le Borgne in ignorance of his true purpose. Had he set forth on the road we had come over, the Minnetaree chief might have forbidden his departure, fearing some trick.

As I walked into the village Le Borgne kept beside me. We could not talk for the lack of an interpreter, yet I sensed a change in the chief. I got the impression something was troubling him. He carried his ax and swung it in short vicious circles. Knowing my success in trading white robes for the girl depended on the particular mood he might be in, I took heart enough to believe his thoughts were for war and not for women. His talk with Flat Mouth evidenced a desire to go to battle. It was possible the White Snake's news about the strangers had aroused the warrior in him.

When we came to Choke-Cherry's hut he halted, and I did the same. Chief of the Wolves and his two younger brothers and the White Snake were posted at regular intervals at the front of the hut. To learn if they were sentinels, I boldly entered the porch and placed my hand on the door. Chief of the Wolves sprang forward and pushed me back. I glanced at Le Borgne and he motioned me to step back. Speaking loudly in English for the girl's benefit, I told Chief of the Wolves to keep his hands off me or I would shoot him. She heard me, and her voice called out—

"Oh, American! I'm afraid!"

Le Borgne thrust forward his head, his one eye glittering like a piece of broken glass in the sunlight. He was suspicious. He forgot I did not talk his lingo and shot out some query which I guessed to be a demand to know what the white woman had said. I made spiral lines with my index finger high above my head, the sign token for medicine and, as one overawed, softly withdrew from inside the porch. He followed me and I called out:

"Don't be afraid. We'll get you out of this."

With a grunt of rage Le Borgne clapped his hand over my lips. With my left hand I repeated the medicine sign, and with my right I drew back my gun the full stretch of my arm until the two muzzles rested under his chin. It was a language he readily understood and he stepped clear of me.

To demonstrate he was not angry he patted my shoulder and called out to his men, evidently telling them I was a brave man. I remained a while before the hut, but the girl did not attempt to address me again, nor did I speak to her. I was interested in watching Le Borgne whenever he glanced at White Snake. It was then that the hint of worry showed between his eyes. Gradually the conviction formed in my mind that he was uneasy over the Snake's budget of news, and was wondering who the strangers might be whose coming so excited his deadly enemies the Sioux. Or perhaps White Snake had told him who they were. He was not angry at the Snake, and yet the sight of him brought the troubled lines in his forehead. It was refreshing to think something besides amorous thoughts were inside that savage brain-pan.

I turned away to go to my hut, and behind me sounded the girl's clear voice, raised in her indescribable song of the woods and the rivers. The effect on the Minnetarees was pronounced. The guards glided away from the hut and betrayed agitation. Le Borgne stood with folded arms, glaring at the rawhide door as if some hostile medicine were challenging him to open it. The voice rippled on, and I knew its purpose was to tell me she had not lost heart, that she believed and depended on the Pillager and me. Le Borgne remained rigid for a few moments, then took a step forward.

I immediately shifted the gun over my left arm, and, did he touch the door, I was ready to let him have the right barrel. But with one foot inside the porch he halted. The voice of the singer climbed to shrill heights, then cascaded down to a low colorful tone which was sadly sweet and infinitely pathetic. The chief drew back his foot and with an explosive grunt hastened away. I dropped the gun to my side.

"Don't be afraid," I called out to her as she ceased her singing. This time no one attempted to stop my speaking to her.

CHAPTER XI

THE PILLAGER SHAKES THE CALF'S TAIL

THE village was quiet and I remained in my hut until near sundown, then ventured forth, anxious for the return of Flat Mouth. If he had had no mishaps with hostile Indians he should make the trip to the lower Mandan village quickly. The men of the village, as was their custom, were lounging on top of their huts, smoking and bragging. Their arrogance was almost past belief. They believed themselves infinitely superior to the white race. They had seen but few whites, and these they looked upon as partly demented because of their willingness to give guns and ammunition for such worthless things as hides and robes.

But this sleepy calm was destroyed as I strolled toward Choke-Cherry's hut in hope of getting a word of encouragement to the girl. One moment all was peace with even the cur dogs silent, the next shrill screams were splitting the air and warriors were dropping from their huts, snatching up weapons and rushing ahead to investigate. The savages' first thought was a surprize attack. I ran with the group that was making for Le Borgne's hut. We came to an abrupt halt and beheld a strange spectacle. An Indian woman, with blood streaming from her arms and breast, with her hair matted over her face, stood under the porch of the chief's hut and was pouring out what I took to be a bitter tirade.

The warriors with me instantly began falling back, betraying every symptom of fear. I held my ground, curious to learn more. The woman clenched her fists and swung her arms and shrieked out her words in a steady stream until the door flew open and Le Borgne stepped out, his ax in his hand.

He was smiling, but his long mane of black hair was much disheveled. He stood before the woman, and I fully expected to witness another murder. She ran to him and hissed and spat like a cat, even attempting to claw his face. He jumped away from her and walked toward the corral; but swift as a wild thing she was at his side, then ahead of him, screaming, clawing at his face and even bringing blood to his brawny chest.

He wheeled to one side to avoid her, and her talons ripped down his arm, leaving red streaks. Undoubtedly it was the first time Le Borgne was ever blooded without striking back. His face was a study in rage and fear. Whichever way he turned she was at his side or before him, her tongue never silent, her claws ripping at his arms and chest. Knowing his people were watching him, he would not depart from his dignity and run for it.

Never once did he threaten violence, even to the extent of pushing her away. He held his head high to escape her hooked fingers, but beyond that he did not try to defend himself. Superstition was his master, and he knew the woman was demented and believed that most woful would be his fate did he, in anger, lay the weight of a finger on one touched by the Great Spirit.

He began working his way back to his hut, jumping from side to side, but never increasing his pace beyond a brisk walk. Then she slipped in some filth and fell, and he seized the opportunity to gain his hut. She was at his heels when he entered, but the door slammed before she could follow him. She beat on the door with her fists and head and yelled in fury.

None of the warriors ventured to remove her. They had returned to their roofs and were eager spectators of the scene. I pitied the poor thing and finally took it upon myself to go to her. As I touched her on the shoulder she wheeled on me like a mad wolf, but the sight of a white instead of a red man seemed to calm her. She made no resistance when I took her arm and gently led her away. She went willingly enough, but the gaze she fastened on my face was not that of a sane person.

I walked with her through the village at random, taking pains to widen the distance between us and the chief's hut. At last some women furtively stole from cover and relieved me of her. It was horrible to hear her heart-broken moaning, and I lost no time in getting it out of my ears. In my haste to escape I found I had returned to Le Borgne's hut, and I waited for him to come out. He preferred, however, to be alone. Perhaps he was busy rubbing buffalo tallow on his wounds.

Feeling faint and remembering I had not eaten anything for hours, I sought out the hut where Choke-Cherry was temporarily housed, gave him an inch of tobacco

and motioned for food. He gave some order to his women and they began overhauling ancient meats. I insisted on fresh meat, for one end of the hut was covered with buffaloes the hunting party had brought in, This had not had time to spoil, and, after the Minnetaree and Mandan custom, was thrown down to grow tainted. I picked out a piece and put it in a copper kettle and the women proceeded to cook it. Then, selecting a fillet, I broiled it and directed a woman to take it to Miss Dearness. On a small stick I scratched:

Fresh meat. Cooked it myself. Keep up your courage. FRANKLIN.

This message I sent along with the fillet. I knew Choke-Cherry and all his wives were despising me for my tastes in insisting on fresh meat, but I remained there and watched the kettle until some of it was done and I could begin eating. When I finished I had had the only satisfying meal since reaching the Missouri.

Quitting the hut, I walked toward the Knife and was rejoiced to behold Flat Mouth coming on the gallop. He dismounted, removed the pack of robes and led his pony to the corral. It was now growing dark, and all the warriors had followed their chief's example and were inside their huts for the night. As we carried the pack to our hut, I briefly narrated the actions of the demented woman.

"She is the mother of the woman Le Borgne killed," he informed. "They talk about the girl's death in the lower village, as her mother was a Mandan. No matter what she says or does, neither Le Borgne nor any of his men would dare touch her so long as she is under the protection of the great *manito*. But others had better keep out of his way, for only blood will satisfy him after her talk. Now I have a big talk for you."

We entered the hut, put our guns aside and I urged him to proceed. First he lighted his pipe and, extending it to me, held it while I took several whiffs, this little attention being the height of courtesy. Then, after puffs to sky and earth and the four wind-gods, he said—

"The strange men the Sioux talk about are white men."

"White men? Then they must be Hudson Bay men," I exclaimed, for I did not believe the N. W. or the X. Y. could be sending men to the Missouri, although the H. B. already had done so.

"Not traders. They carry a big flag. They have guns. The lower village was told about them by White Snake. Le Borgne now knows white men are coming up the river."

"What do you think about them?"

"The white woman's medicine brought them," he promptly declared. "It will be a long time before they get here——"

"Then how can they help us?" I broke in, a rude breach of etiquette with an Indian.

He smoked in silence for a good five minutes, then coldly resumed:

"A long time in getting here, but Le Borgne has his village here and can not change it. He will be here when they come. He fears they are friends of the Sioux. Big medicine for Medicine Hair."

This time I waited to make sure he had finished, then asked—

"How?"

With the utmost gravity he replied:

"The white woman will say the big white chief, her father, comes with many white men. Her medicine will tell her in a dream, she shall say. She will tell it to the Minnetarees. Le Borgne thinks only he and the White Snake and the Mandans in the lower village know about the white man. He will think it big medicine if she dreams it and tells him."

"Good!" I cried, deeply pleased at the deception Flat Mouth had so adroitly suggested. "It may give us a fighting chance. Le Borgne is in a bad mind."

"That is good! He will not have time to think of a new wife. He will be afraid bad luck is trailing him. He will be ripe for our trade."

"Is that all Eshkebugecoshe has to tell?"

"On riding to the village I met a scout of the Cheyennes. They have crossed the river in hope of falling on some hunting party before going home. We talked in the sign-language. I sent a sign-talk to the Cheyenne chief, saying we would leave here with the medicine-woman after this one sleep. I said I would bring the Assiniboin scalps and he and his warriors must be ready to go with us to the Mouse. That was the trade we made when they were putting presents under the stem."

This would make it the following night. Well, we either would go or we wouldn't. I wrote on a strip of bark:

There are white men far down the river. Le Borgne is much concerned. He does not know whether they are allies of the Sioux or not. You must have a dream tonight that the white men are led by your father, the big white chief, that they are coming here with many guns, that worse than death will be the fate of any one who interferes with your liberty, let alone seeking you as a wife. Flat Mouth will interpret it to Le Borgne.

I read it to Flat Mouth and he smiled appreciatively and declared my "mystery talk" was very big medicine. I asked him if he had met any Minnetarees on his return by the river road. He shook his head, and I decided that for twenty-four hours at least Le Borgne would not know he had been to the lower village. Thus the girl's announcement concerning the strangers down the river would come in the nature of a dream-revelation and make a profound impression on the savage chief.

Whatever the supernatural powers had to report to their red children was revealed through the medium of dreams. You could never make Le Borgne believe that the visions seen in sleep were not veritable views of the unseen world wherein all earthly affairs were ordered and the future of every man foreseen.

TAKING our guns, we made our way through the darkness to Choke-Cherry's hut and after much bother got him to open the door. We would have proceeded to the girl's hut were it not for the guards on duty there. For two inches of tobacco I bribed him to make one of his women take a bowl of fresh water and a bowl of corn to the girl. I explained to him that the piece of bark I placed on the corn was a medicine to make her hungry.

The Pillager and I followed the woman until we heard her explain her errand to one of the guards and the door open and close upon her. This was about all we could do and, as the morrow promised to tax our strength, we went back to our hut and turned in for a few hours' sleep.

With the first gray light the Pillager aroused me. He had procured fresh meat from some of the hunters and hurriedly broiled it over the fire. As fast as a portion was cooked enough to be edible he cut it off for me and took the next slice, practically raw, for himself. In this fashion we made a hearty meal and set out to see if Miss Dearness had complied with my directions. As we came in sight of her prison I knew she had acted promptly, for the guards, four of them, were grouped before something hanging on the outside wall and were staring at it curiously.

The savages gave way sullenly as we advanced to read her message. They were in half a mind to order us back, but Flat Mouth was too forbidding to be hustled about. His statement that I was the only one who could tell what was in the mystery talk afforded them an excuse for permitting us the freedom of the porch.

Miss Dearness had written on the reverse side of my piece of bark:

People of the Minnetaree, and the Blind One, their chief:

In the night dream-medicine came to me. I saw many white men with many guns far down the Missouri coming to these villages of the Mandans and the Minnetarees. I saw the big white chief, the greatest of all traders, leading the white men. I saw the Sioux begging them to stop with them. He is too strong for them to rob or kill. I heard him tell the Sioux he was coming here to build a post because the white woman, Medicine Hair, is here. I heard him tell the Sioux he would return and build a post in their country if he was not treated well by the Minnetarees, or if the white woman had not been treated well. The Sioux begged him to give them some of his many guns, and he told them they should have them if the white woman was troubled in any way by Le Borgne or his people. Le Borgne, the Blind One, the dream means you will bring the Sioux against you, every warrior carrying a gun, if you do not let the white woman come and go as she wishes, and if you do not tell your people there will be no feast, no new hut.

I translated it hastily to the Pillager, and his eyes glistened as he pronounced it good. I noticed in the writing what, perhaps, he did not. She did not refer to herself as being the daughter of the mythical big white chief. I had made much of the relationship, taking my cue from Flat Mouth. She had acquiesced in it. Now, apparently, she could not do it, though Red Dearness would be the last to object to his daughter using any subterfuge to cheat an Indian.

Flat Mouth was for bringing out the robes and placing them on sale at once. I advised waiting until we could learn the chief's mood. Flat Mouth then asked if we should take the writing to the chief now. Again I was for delay. To my way of thinking the girl's "dream" should be announced to Le Borgne at a psychological

moment, at some time during the sale of the robes. I knew the fellow well enough to realize that he could not be forced into any decision. The pressure must be applied gradually; the effect must be accumulative; then, if we could bring him to a pitch where he wavered, the girl's revelation should be used as the last straw. The Pillager was good enough to proclaim my reasoning sound, only he destroyed all compliment in his speech by adding that it was the white woman's medicine working through my tongue.

We stepped clear of the porch and were about to return to the hut and our pack of robes, when again I heard that fearful screaming. The guards scurried to less exposed positions; even the Pillager betrayed concern. The screaming grew louder and the Pillager, too proud to run and hide, flattened himself against the wall of the hut and stared uneasily at the pitiable figure now appearing from between two huts.

Le Borgne's demented mother-in-law was a sorry sight as she passed us, tossing her hands and tearing at her hair. Since her last appearance she had slashed herself with a knife, for she was bleeding from several fresh wounds. She walked with her head thrown far back, yet she neither stumbled nor fell nor wandered from the middle of the narrow way. This to the Pillager was simply another proof that she was under the direct control of the great *manito*. She was making straight to Le Borgne's hut. As soon as she passed a hut the inmates would emerge and climb to the roof, none daring to follow her. I followed her, however, and for this reason the Pillager followed too.

We halted on coming in sight of Le Borgne's porch and were just in time to see the war-chief duck inside. The woman, with her head still flung back and her gaze directed to the heavens, gave an ear-splitting shriek and ran forward. How she saw him or knew he had retreated into the hut was a mystery to me. Nevertheless she did know and, with a maniacal cry, ran on to the porch and attempted to open the door.

After several minutes of furious efforts she backed away and began cursing him:

"Oh, one-eyed killer of women! May your medicine turn to water! May the Sioux tear out your heart and give it to the dogs!" she screamed.

The Pillager was so deeply impressed by her terrible prayer that he interpreted only patches of it. For some minutes she carried on in this violent fashion, then, with a despairing shriek, she turned and fled swiftly between the huts.

"It is bad to have such words spoken against you," gravely said the Pillager. "Le Borgne may say he doesn't care, but inside he is very much afraid."

The more frightened the Minnetaree became, the better the day looked for us, and, feeling almost optimistic, I led the way to Choke-Cherry's hut and cooked some meat and sent it to Miss Dearness. Despite his hearty meal at our hut the Pillager broiled for himself several slices of meat and devoured them voraciously. When he had finished I said I was ready to offer the robes. To my surprize he objected.

"The white woman's medicine is working through the mad woman," he insisted. "Let the medicine work. We will wait. We have until the sun goes down. My blood tells me something is in the air that will make this day remembered among the Minnetaree."

"Do you think the woman's people—she being a Mandan—will make trouble for Le Borgne?"

He smiled grimly.

"They are dogs. They do not dare lift their heads when he looks at them. They will say she took a Minnetaree man and now belongs to that tribe; that the daughter, the dead woman, is a Minnetaree. We will climb on a hut and watch what comes next."

This we did, selecting the hut we were in. Some thirty warriors were already there. They respectfully made way for the Pillager, and we took a position facing Le Borgne's hut.

WE SAT there but a few minutes, smoking our pipes and watching the many curious groups dotting the surrounding roofs, when we observed, off to our left, a commotion among the spectators. They were swarming to the south side of the roofs, craning their necks and keeping very quiet.

"She is coming again," whispered Flat Mouth, putting up his pipe. "She is like a ghost that can not find sleep."

As the guttural chatter on the roofs

subsided, I heard her voice wailing in a low-pitched key as she once more was impelled to make the rounds of the village. We could trace her progress by watching the people on the roofs. Then the moaning undertone leaped high like heat-lightning as she flayed Le Borgne, using terms that would bring death to any other in the five villages.

She denounced him as a stealer of women, as a killer of women. These accusations, especially the first, might be easily overlooked, even accepted as something complimentary. But when she added he was a coward, that the sight of a man's blood made him sick, that he dared not leave his hut unless surrounded by many braves, the effect was quickly registered inside the hut. He began bellowing in terrible rage, and the warriors on the roofs began shifting their positions so they might not be so prominent when he showed himself. Those remaining on the ground scurried to climb up on the huts, or ran for the outskirts of the village.

Flat Mouth breathed with a hissing sound, as he read these signs of fear, and whispered—

"They are afraid to meet their chief when he comes out!"

For fully ten minutes the woman kept up her vilification, her tongue never ceasing, her bitterness never losing its acid edge; then, as she had done before, she turned and ran swiftly away. Some women darted from a hut, seized her and induced her to go with them. Chief of the Wolves dropped from a roof and ran to his uncle's hut announcing her departure. The door flew open with a smash, and the chief jumped out. Chief of the Wolves disappeared between two huts after one glance at the man's face.

Le Borgne was frightful to behold. To me he seemed to be as insane as the woman. He had thrown aside his cloak and wore only his breech-clout, his long coarse hair enveloping him like a shaggy cloak. His gigantic body trembled and shook. Standing before his porch, he crouched low and began jerking his ax up and down by the wrist-thong, all the time twisting his head back and forth to rake the village with his baleful glance. Then, straightening and lifting his arms above his head, he emitted a bull-like roar and smashed his ax against the long platform filled with driftwood. He was praying for an enemy to appear—some one he could vent his blood-lust upon.

"He goes mad like the woman," murmured the Pillager, his hands twitching as he crouched on the edge of the hut and glared down at the chief. He reminded me of a Red River lynx on a bough about to leap on its prey.

"He asks his *manito* to send him something he can fight and kill. It would be a good coup to take his scalp!"

"It would mean death for the white woman and for us," I sternly rebuked, fearing lest he seek to test his strength against Le Borgne's.

"Not if it is her medicine working through him as it is working through the woman," he muttered, licking his lips wolfishly and craning his neck to watch the movements of the chief.

Le Borgne roared even more loudly and without cessation. It was just a bestial cry with no words in it. As he howled his horrible yearning for battle his arms kept up a violent gesticulation, and the men on the huts crept to the opposite sides so as to remain unseen. The Pillager and I remained where we were.

"Ho!" grunted the Pillager, smiling savagely. "Very soon I must fight that man, because he will have it so. They say he can fight good. I will wear a painted hand on my arm after we get back to the Red River to show I dodged under his ax and struck him with my empty hand on the arm before killing him."

"Are you going mad? Are you a foolish man?" I cried. "You say it is the woman's medicine working; then let it work. It has not asked you to do anything."

"Watch!" hissed the Pillager, balancing on the edge of the roof.

What I saw gave me hope that the grim pantomime was ended, for Le Borgne suddenly darted back into his hut.

"He will stay hidden until the woman comes and makes him a madman again," I said.

But the Pillager seemed abnormally contented as he kept his eyes fastened on the closed door; his hands no longer twitched. Before I had time to wonder at this marked change in his demeanor, the door of the hut flew open again and now Le Borgne was wearing his robe. The Pillager gathered his heels under him and

slipped his hand through the noosed thong of his war-ax. He said—

"Watch!"

Stalking a few rods from his hut, Le Borgne raised his mighty voice in a war-cry and, catching the robe with his left arm, he swung it round his head and hurled it aside. It opened and caught the wind and fluttered like some monster moth to the ground.

"He has cast his robe! The white woman's medicine has made him cast his robe," softly rejoiced the Pillager. "Now he is under vow to his *manito* to kill the first person he meets, man, woman, or child, that doesn't belong to his tribe. All the village knows it, and the Minnetarees will stay in hiding, although his vow does not mean he will kill any of them. You and the chief of the Pillager Chippewas are not of his tribe."

Now the muscles of his arms and legs were knotting in bunches, then relaxing and rippling smoothly as he prepared to leap to the ground and have at the brute.

I grasped his arm and warned:

"You must not do it. The white woman's medicine does not call you to fight him."

Le Borgne raised his war-cry and began stalking the empty spaces between the huts in search of a victim to satisfy his vow. Doors slammed throughout the village and the men on the roofs lay flat and hidden from view, although a Minnetaree should have had no cause for fear. Le Borgne doubled over and shook out his hair and danced from side to side, the silence of the people permitting the *thud-thud* of his stamping moccasins to be plainly audible.

"He has said it! He cries for blood! He dances for death! The Medicine Hair's *manito* makes him do it. Her *manito* pushes me to him. I will go and kill him!" snarled the Pillager, striving to cast off my grip.

"You will kill us all," I cried, feeling my hold breaking.

"I'll kill Le Borgne, who has cast his robe," panted the Pillager. Then he raised the war-cry of his tribe and, wrenching loose, dropped to the ground.

I stood up, intending to follow him and make sure with my gun of the death of Le Borgne if he fought with my friend, when I observed the Minnetaree chief had shifted his course so as to place our hut between him and the Pillager. I looked down on the Pillager, and he, thinking Le Borgne was all but upon him, was shaking out his Sioux scalps and engaging in a little ceremonial dance of his own, brandishing his ax most adeptly. I looked back after Le Borgne and saw the mad woman running toward him.

It was a tense situation. Le Borgne, bowed low and intent on his grotesque steps, did not see the fury approaching him. The Pillager, with a segment of the hut between him and his man, was conducting his advance with close attention to ritual, never dreaming of the woman's presence. The first that Le Borgne knew of the woman was when she grabbed him by the hair. With a roar he straightened, swinging her feet off the ground and raising his ax. She screamed vituperations and fell back to the ground with both hands filled with hair. Le Borgne recognized her in time to save himself from a hideous crime—the killing of one under the Great Spirit's protection.

With a shout of rage and fear he leaped back. She was at his face again, and, for a second, I believed he would brain her. Then his arms dropped to his side and he turned his back on her. She caught his long hair and began tearing it out, making terrible animal cries as she did so. He paid no attention to her and did not seem to sense her presence, but swung his ax and hurled it high over the nearest hut, and then strode rapidly to his own hut with the woman worrying his neck and hair. She released him as he reached his porch. He went inside and closed the door.

I looked about for the Pillager and beheld him standing with folded arms, disgustedly watching the anticlimax. I dropped down beside him and exclaimed—

"He didn't kill her!"

"He could not kill her," he growled. "She has been touched by the big *manito*. No one can hurt her, no matter what she does. Her coming was bad medicine for my coup. Had I seen her, I would have reached him first; then his heart would have been glad and his ax would have sung a song as it hissed against mine. Yet it could not kill her, although she is not of his people—" and he made the spiral sign with his finger—"so his vow is broken. He cast his robe for nothing, and that is

very bad medicine for him, but not so bad as if he stuck his ax in the woman's head. A strong medicine has shown him he can not always do as he promises. But it is very bad not to keep a vow. It will hurt him with his people unless he can get some good-luck medicine. The medicine of the white woman works against him all the time."

"He must have seen you, yet he did not offer to fight you," I said.

"Why should he fight me?" asked the Pillager in surprize. "He had no fight with me except as my coming let him make good his promise. When the woman reached him first his vow was spoiled; he had no promise left, so he threw away his ax to tell every one the vow was dead. But it is very bad for him." There was almost a touch of sympathy in the Pillager's voice as he said the last.

"How long must we wait before we show the robes and offer to trade?" I asked.

"Now is a good time. Le Borgne knows bad luck is biting his heels. He is afraid that everything is against him. He needs a strong medicine. He is not thinking of feasts and a new wife."

IT WAS pleasant indeed to get into action again. As we passed the girl's hut I called out to her, and she opened the door a crack and spoke—

"Can we do it tonight?"

Owing to the fear and confusion over Le Borgne's behavior we could have done it then if we had had her at the corral. The guards about her hut were still in hiding.

"It must be tonight if I fail in what I'm about to try. I am going to offer to buy you first."

"Buy me?" she faintly repeated. "But you have no goods."

"If I fail we will get away tonight," I comforted. "When I call your name step to the door and touch the writing on the bark, then get back out of sight."

At this point Chief of the Wolves ran up and reminded that we were not to talk with the white woman. However, he was very civil about it and displayed no arrogance. His gaze rested on the Pillager with a sort of worshipful admiration, and he added:

"I saw the Chippewa chief drop to the ground. I thought he was about to drop into Le Borgne's arms. What a battle that would have been!"

"Not a long battle—just a cracked skull and the Minnetareses would have to look for a new war-chief," calmly retorted the Pillager.

Now old Choke-Cherry came trotting up, his broad face picturing deep trouble.

"I have been to see my brother," he whispered. "Bad spirits are around him. Never before has a Minnetaree chief cast his robe and not done as he said."

"He needs new medicine," I advised.

"He will give many ponies for a new medicine," eagerly cried Choke-Cherry. "Has the white man some magic he will trade for ponies?"

"I have some medicine I will trade," I replied. "I don't know whether I will trade for ponies, or robes, or something else. It is a very strong medicine and will kill all bad luck, but I will not trade it for poor ponies. I want ponies such as the Cheyennes have."

Choke-Cherry's face showed great fear. If he told this to his brother, the chief would bitterly upraid him for not turning over the two Assiniboins to the Cheyennes for the ten ponies offered.

"We have many good robes," he cried. "Let the white man bring out his medicine. I will tell the village to be ready to trade. If the medicine is new and strong and will help the heart of Le Borgne to grow stout again, and his head to grow clear again, we will give every robe in the five villages."

"We will see," I carelessly answered, walking away.

"Now is the time," muttered Flat Mouth as I hurried to get the pack.

"The best of times," I rejoiced. "Le Borgne is afraid his buffalo *manito* has lost its strength. He cast his robe and made himself a foolish man. The villages will think his war-medicine is spoiled. He must get good-luck medicine, or else there will be a new war-chief."

The Pillager well understood the method of offering a white robe for sale and undertook charge of the arrangements. Two upright stakes were placed before the door of the hut facing Miss Dearness' prison. Across these supports he placed a third stake. The open space before the hut was packed. The roofs of the surrounding huts were covered with the curious. The Pillager took advantage of the opportunity

to indulge in oratory. By his touching his ax and the Sioux scalps I knew he was declaiming his greatness, and, as all must have known his willingness to fight Le Borgne, he was heard with the deepest respect and attention. But when he reached behind him and fumbled with the cords of the pack and continued his talk his audience smiled skeptically.

He paused and said to me in Chippewa:

"I have told them we never bother to trade in anything but white robes. I have said we carry a pack of them with us wherever we go but never offer to trade unless we see something we want very much. These dogs think my tongue is crooked."

Then, picking up the robe, he flung it over the crosspiece.

A shout of amazement greeted the appearance of the robe. Choke-Cherry exclaimed—

"The Sioux-Killer spoke with a straight tongue!"

Flat Mouth angrily cried out—

"Did you think a chief of the Pillager Chippewas, wearer of many eagle feathers, would come to the Missouri to tell lies to hut Indians?"

"It is a fine robe. We will buy it," declared Chief of the Wolves.

Ignoring him, Flat Mouth reached into the pack and drew out another robe and threw it over the first. Choke-Cherry was inarticulate for several minutes. Admiration, awe and covetousness were reflected in the disjointed outcries of the Minnetarees. When Choke-Cherry recovered speech it was to hoarsely proclaim:

"Better medicine was never brought to a Minnetaree village in my day. Chippewa, Sioux-Killer, set your price. We will buy the robes."

"They are not mine to sell," informed Flat Mouth, dragging forth the third robe and draping it over the others so the three tails hung in a row.

"They are common robes colored with white earth," accused Chief of the Wolves, crowding forward and clutching roughly at the top robe. But as his fingers encountered the fleece and his suspicious gaze failed to find any trace of a deception, his jaw grew slack and he stared stupidly at the treasure. "My uncle speaks true," he faltered. "We will buy them if it takes all the robes in all the villages."

Through the Chippewa I repeated what I already had said to Choke-Cherry; namely, that while I did not care to take the white robes with me on leaving the village, I had seen nothing yet for which I would trade. Whatever it was it must be of the best. I was not even prepared to say I would take robes, ponies, dressed leather, or a combination of such goods in payment. I would display the robes and see what the Minnetarees had to offer. If I found something to my liking I would trade.

"So be it!" howled old Choke-Cherry. "Take what you will. We can get more. But never was such a chance to get medicine robes. I will give my medicine-pipe. It is a great mystery—very strong medicine."

"Yet it could not make the Cheyennes lead their ponies under the stem," sneered Flat Mouth.

"The village shall buy them and give them to our chief, so his bad luck may grow red again," said Chief of the Wolves.

"The Blind needs much medicine to make him open his one eye," ironically remarked Flat Mouth.

NO ONE heeded this derisive speech, for a mighty trade had come to the Missouri and must be completed. Grunts and yelps arose when the Pillager produced the fourth and last of the robes and hung it in place.

"It is magic!" faltered Choke-Cherry, edging backward. "The white man can make the Sioux-Killer find white robes all day."

"If it is magic then the robes will turn brown after they have gone away," said Chief of the Wolves.

The Pillager smiled scornfully, saying—

"You talk like foolish men."

Raising a hand in silence and attention, he dipped into the pack for the last time and reverently lifted up the small calfskin, all white but for the black border round the right eye. This he exhibited to the astounded mob and then gently laid it on the robes. The calfskin was much more valuable than the robes.

The deep silence which followed this climax was broken by the Pillager announcing—

"This is all we bring this time."

"You said you had nothing to trade," gasped Choke-Cherry.

"I always have something to trade when I think there is something worth trading

for," I corrected. "My medicine has told me in my sleep that I could make a good trade here. I am waiting to see what my medicine meant."

Men darted away to inform Le Borgne of the powerful medicine. Others scoured the village to round up property. A scene of amazing activity followed. In a short time seven horses were brought up, each loaded with robes, dressed leather, moccasins and embroidered leggings. Without bothering to glance at this, the first bid, the Pillager shook the calf's tail as a sign of refusal.

Choke-Cherry dashed frantically among the men and hooted long-winded speeches to which no one seemed to pay any attention. He was exhorting them to greater efforts in syndicating their goods. As proof of his own desire to help win the miracle for the good of the village, he brought out his medicine-pipe, newly decorated with feathers and hairs. The horses and truck were left at one side, and the warriors separated to round up more collateral.

A warrior returned from Le Borgne's hut saying the chief wished the robes to be bought in with no delay and delivered to him. After receiving them he would come out and see his people. I fancied that in each mind was the fear that unless the robes were delivered, per request, he would come out anyway, to see his people, and would come with his wrist thrust through the loop of his war-ax. Seven more horses were brought forward, this time the pick of the herd, and in addition to the robes were many of their copper kettles. As their superstition forbad them cooking meat in their earthen pots, the offer of the kettles was conclusive proof of their determination to procure the robes.

Again Flat Mouth shook the tail. Again the Minnetarees scattered for more goods. Chief of the Wolves, I noted, darted away toward his uncle's hut, and with my gun in my lap I thereafter kept an eye out. It was while the savages were collecting their third batch of goods that Le Borgne came hurrying toward us, his nephew walking behind him. The chief carried his ax. He had been told the robes were not to be bought in a hurry and he was very angry, a sullen rage that burned on top of his former wrath when he was compelled to violate his vow. He wore his robe.

The Pillager gave me a quick look, and I patted my gun and smiled grimly. If Le Borgne attempted to get the robes by casting his robe again and slaying the first alien he met, he would never more than get started in lifting his ax. The Pillager, who was naked to his clout, picked up his robe and threw it over his shoulder. I followed his example, borrowing one hanging inside the porch where I sat.

Le Borgne grasped the significance of our action and surveyed us in silence for several moments through his smoldering eye, his ghastly grin making him look like a death's head.

"The day is warm," he boomed, slipping off his robe and giving it to Chief of the Wolves to hold.

"It is very warm in the sun," agreed the Pillager, dropping his robe to the ground. I was glad to throw mine off.

WITH this unspoken agreement that there should be no casting of robes, the chief took a few minutes to sweep his eye over the horses and goods and the white robes and, more precious than all, the calfskin. His voice was unsteady as he asked—

"Where did the white man get these medicine robes and the hide?"

"Far from here," I briefly replied.

Le Borgne turned on his people and warned:

"This is no time to bring a few ponies. This is a big medicine sale. It must end quickly. Mighty medicine does not like to be hung out in the sun waiting for a buyer." Then to me, the Pillager interpreting: "Go to all the Minnetaree huts and take all you find, save only that one hut." And he pointed to where the girl was imprisoned.

He was practically offering all movable property in the village. I have no doubt but that he would have thrown in the huts if we had had a way to take them with us. I shook my head. The Pillager reached down and wagged the tail.

My refusal threw the chief into a paroxysm of rage, yet he restrained himself and said:

"Go to all the Minnetaree huts! Go to all the Mandan huts on the Missouri! Take what you will—all the ponies you will. If any Mandan tries to stop you, tell him I sent you!"

"My medicine tells me it is not robes and kettles and ponies I want," I replied. "I can get kettles among the white people. I can get better ponies and robes among the Cheyennes."

"What do you want?" he fiercely demanded.

"Miss Dearness!" I called.

The words meant nothing to him, but at the sound of her name the girl began singing, and the door of her hut opened. She stood there, wrapped in her *capote*, long enough to touch the piece of bark hanging on the wall. Then she retired and closed the door.

"My medicine tells me that is what I will buy with my robes," I said to Le Borgne.

Le Borgne swung his ax and roared a refusal.

The Pillager spoke to Choke-Cherry, who timidly procured the piece of bark containing the girl's writing and brought it to me. I motioned for Le Borgne to give heed, and proceeded to read the message very slowly, the Pillager interpreting and, of course, embellishing it somewhat. Le Borgne listened attentively, after the first few words, and his strong face grew uneasy as he heard the girl's "dream."

She had seen the white men, many of them, with many guns, coming up the Missouri to the Mandans and the Minnetarees. The whites were too strong for the Sioux to trouble. It jolted him when he was told the leader of the whites was the big white chief we had talked so much about since reaching the river. His face lighted when he was told the white chief would build a post in the village because Medicine Hair, the white woman, was there. And it grew dark as night when he was warned what would happen if he troubled the white woman, or limited her coming and going.

"I have never wanted a woman I did not take," he roared.

"If her father, the big chief, is coming with many guns and men I do not need to buy her," I carelessly said, shifting the position of the calfskin so Le Borgne would observe the black markings round the right eye.

He had not noticed this peculiarity before, and for the moment it drove all thoughts of the woman out of his head. It was his right eye that was dead. The right eye of the medicine calf was circled with black, denoting death. If ever a *manito* sent a particular medicine to a great warrior, surely thus was the skin sent to Le Borgne.

"You want this woman for your woman?" he demanded.

Of course the girl heard the Pillager repeat it in Chippewa, as he talked loudly.

"I do. That is why I offer to make a trade for her."

"You can go back and get other white women. There are some more?" he asked.

"Many of them—more than there are Indian women."

He laughed aloud at such an exaggeration.

"Why do you want this one when you can get so many? I want her. She is the only white woman I have seen. If there were many of them here I would sell her for a pony."

"If there were many of them here you could not get the medicine robes," I retorted, forced to play the game according to his savage viewpoint and hold it strictly to the level of barter and trade.

"I will not sell her," he growled.

His brother implored him to change his mind, but did not dare go beyond a few faltering words. The warriors looked glum, and more than one angry glance was cast at Miss Dearness' hut. They wanted to see their chief in possession of the robes. To murder us and appropriate the robes would be a violation of their etiquette, besides being sure to bring down retribution upon them in some way, such as the loss of a trading-post. Afraid as they were of their leader, I could see some of them thought he was paying too high a price for his whim. If his medicine suffered, then the whole tribe suffered.

I spoke to the Pillager. He gathered up the robes and the skin and repacked them, with the calfskin on top, the black eye showing. While Le Borgne had refused the trade, I had not lost hopes of buying the girl. His refusal was to prove his independence, and, perhaps, had been incited by a glimpse of the girl's white face.

LE BORGNE stood and glared at us, his hands fingering his big ax, his eye observing the double-barreled gun across my left arm.

Deep in the village rose a dismal chanting. The mother of the murdered girl was abroad again. The effect on Le Borgne

was immediate. His eye flickered with fear. The woman was getting on his nerves. He wished himself back in his hut with the door barred, as shown by his instinctive glance in that direction. Yet he could not spend the rest of his life in a hut.

It was intolerable to anticipate months and perhaps years of the woman's nagging—her accusations of cowardice. Let even a mad woman repeat a thing long enough, and he would lose something of his standing in the tribe. While he must not touch her, he should be protected by his medicine.

If his medicine was spoiled he must renew it. The chanting grew louder and clearer. Miss Dearness also heard it, for she now sang out to me:

"Choke-Cherry's wife, when bringing me meat, said the crazy Mandan woman is going back to her people in the lower village."

I picked up the calfskin and said to Le Borgne:

"I think you are a foolish man, but I am not to blame for that. I am angry because Chief of the Wolves spoke evil of my medicine robes and skin. I will prove to you that the medicine is strong in this skin. You shall hold it in your hands until the crazy woman comes and goes. Then you shall give it back to me, and I will take my pack elsewhere and trade."

He seized it greedily and I stood aside and waited. I smoked and tried to show the unconcern I did not feel. I had acted on an impulse set in motion by Miss Dearness' words. I also believed I could detect a new tone in the poor woman's lament, the quality of sadness and resignation. The people stood very quietly, all eyes turned to where the Mandan woman would emerge from among the huts. If the sight of the chief should inflame her mad rage, the trade value of the white calfskin would greatly depreciate. In that event we would make a good fight of it that night.

Now the woman appeared, her head bowed low, her chanting weirdly depressing. The stage was well set for her coming. The Minnetarees fell back to give her clear passage and no one spoke nor moved. The chief and I stood a little in advance of the people, he standing like an image, holding the white calfskin in his two hands, his ax dangling from his wrist, his one eye fixed on the woman.

She drew close and I believed she was to pass by without lifting her head, but the steady impact of Le Borgne's gaze caused her to look up. For a moment I believed she was going to fly at him, for she halted and stared in his face. Still, there was a sane light in her eyes now. She recognized the powerful medicine he was holding.

The silence of the people was impressive. The whole affair smacked of the ritualistic. Perhaps she realized she had a leading part in it, and must not destroy the symmetry of the whole. Or the poor thing may have been just heartbroken and only anxious to get back to her people in the lower village. Whatever the influence that kept her subdued, she gazed for a moment into the brute's face, then dropped her head, resumed her chanting and walked on toward the river road.

I plucked the skin from Le Borgne's hand rather briskly and tossed it to the Pillager to replace in the pack.

"White man, wait!" hoarsely cried Le Borgne. "Give it back to me!"

"You will trade?"

"Take the white woman! Give me the robes and the skin!"

"Miss Dearness!" I called out. "Don't come to the door till I give the word. Then be ready to ride. I've bought you!"

I nodded to the expressionless-faced Pillager and he handed the pack over to Le Borgne, who started hurriedly for his hut, hugging his new medicine close. Old Choke-Cherry yowled in joy, and assured me such a medicine-feast would be given that night as never was before enjoyed by the Willow Indians, as the Minnetarees call themselves. I did not seek to discourage him, but so soon as the Pillager brought the horses I purposed to start for the Mouse River. Already the Pillager was making for the corral.

NOW the Minnetarees had a despicable custom in trade of agreeing to a bargain, exchanging the goods, pronouncing themselves perfectly well satisfied, and, after an hour or so, coming back and demanding that their property be returned to them, leaving the purchase price "on the ground" as they say. Flat Mouth had told me about these trade tricks by which they hoped to induce the trader to increase the price first agreed upon. Not once, but as often as the victim will endure this insolent disregard of the bargain, will

they come back and ask for their property or an increase in goods.

Whether Le Borgne would act in this fashion in an ordinary trade I did not know. I was inclined to believe he would trade fair, but, with the girl as the stake, the temptation would be great, once he got over his first enthusiasm in owning the robes. He might be cunning enough to believe that the white skin had already sent the Mandan woman from his village, and that she had seemed to be the source of his annoyance and trouble. That his murder of the younger woman was back of it all would never appeal to him.

Soon the Pillager came back with the horses, riding one with his gun held high, his bow and quiver of arrows over his shoulder and his other hand clutching the two halter ropes. He was closely followed by a crowd of men, women and children. Chief of the Wolves was very active in getting in front of his horse and causing the chief to rein in. I stepped to Miss Dearness' hut and spoke her name. She opened the door and came out, her head closely muffled, her face very pale and her blue eyes blinking at the sun.

"I saw it all," she whispered. "I cut a hole through the hide-door. It was brave of you, wise of you. I'm so glad you—bought me!"

A commotion in the crowd attracted my attention. Chief of the Wolves, sensing our purpose and seeking to delay us, had crossed in front of the Pillager's mount once too often. Struck by the horse's shoulder, he had been hurled to one side. An angry murmur arose. Flat Mouth brought the two horses to the porch and, as I took charge of them, he backed his horse violently, splitting the mob into two sections. Then he brought his animal about, faced the savages and, with his ax held out to one side, he leaned forward and cried—

"Do you want to see a Pillager Chippewa cast his robe?"

Old Choke-Cherry urged the men to give us room and not to crowd round us like foolish children. Chief of the Wolves crawled to his feet and glared murder at the Pillager's back. Then he glimpsed me with the double-barrel, and slunk aside.

"Make a hole through them, Eshkebugecoshe!" I called out, slapping the girl's mount and sending her after the chief.

Flat Mouth's horse commenced prancing and bolting from side to side as if unmanageable, and the crowd broke and scattered, some diving into doorways, some running in between huts, and, as the way cleared, the Pillager advanced with the girl close behind him. I came last with my gun half raised, watching the tops of the huts as well as the ground. No one, however, made any active demonstration against us. We avoided Le Borgne's hut and struck north for the Missouri. In my last glimpse of the Minnetarees I beheld Chief of the Wolves running toward Le Borgne's hut with old Choke-Cherry bobbing after him.

We soon made the Missouri, and Flat Mouth quickly found a bull-boat. I paddled Miss Dearness across, and he swam over with her horse in tow. Leaving my gun with her, the Indian and I went back. I remained in the boat and towed my mount over, while my friend repeated his feat of swimming.

Flat Mouth said three days of ordinary travel would take us to the Côteau du Missouri, the high ridge separating the waters of the Missouri and the Mouse, but believed we should make it easily in a bit less than that as we had no pack-animals and were sacrificing everything for speed.

He set the course for Miss Dearness and me to follow while he rode down the river to pick up the Cheyennes. The girl and I had not gone far before he came after us with twenty warriors. They would go with us to the Côteau, he said, but no farther, as our line of flight was along the western edge of the Sioux territory. When I asked him where the rest of the Cheyennes were, he said they had crossed the river to go home, being afraid of the Sioux.

Before sundown our escort abruptly bid us good-by and galloped madly back to the Missouri. Perhaps it was better that way, for while the twenty horsemen gave us a brave appearance, they also furnished a large target for a Sioux eye. It would be necessary for them to delay and kill meat, and our pace would be much slower than when we rode alone. That night Flat Mouth used his bow and arrows with good effect, and we had fresh meat.

For two days more we pushed on, watching for the Assiniboins on the west and ahead of us, for the Sioux on the east and ahead of us. Then we struck the ridge

and beheld a high hill which Flat Mouth called the Dog's House. What was most encouraging was to behold the banks of the Mouse.

That night as we sat in the smoke of a smudge to protect ourselves from the mosquitoes, wearing dressed-leather hoods over our heads as an additional protection, Miss Dearness coughed and choked and at last managed to say—

"The X. Y. will pay you for the robes and skin you paid for me."

"Never," I imperiled my lungs by replying. "It's the only trade I ever made I was satisfied with. I've only one thing to regret."

She nodded for me to explain, and I said—

"Since we started from the Missouri you've been so wrapped and bundled up I've forgotten what the color of your hair is."

Instantly the hood flew off, the *capote* fell back, and, in defiance to the millions of mosquitoes, the red glory of her hair was revealed. With a yelp of protest I leaned forward to aid in adjusting the hood and the *capote* and, losing my balance, would have made clumsy work of it had she not caught my elbow and steadied me for a second.

Flat Mouth, who had been with the horses to see that the torture inflicted by the mosquitoes did not stampede the animals, now drew up to our fire, the horses crowding in behind him to get into the smoke. I wanted to talk with the girl—to have her talk to me, and yet I was glad he came. I fired questions at him to keep my mind from her.

We learned our course now would be down-grade and over a pleasant country with no obstacles to speak of. The land was dotted with small hillocks and these usually were covered with buffaloes. If it had not been for the mosquitoes, the trip would have been very comfortable. Of course we must forever be on the watch against the Assiniboins and Sioux—and also against a pursuing party of the Minnetarees. The latter we expected to discover at any time, swarming down on us to give back our robes and reclaim the girl. Not until we reached the ridge did we cast them out of our fears.

The first night after quitting the ridge, when a fresh wind had blown the mosquitoes away and we were bowing our heads over our cooking, some uncontrollable impulse seized me and mastered me, and shortly I awoke to the astounding fact that I had kissed the girl.

She made no move of resentment, nor said any word, but put on her dressed-leather hood and glanced at me reproachfully. I jumped to my feet and strode off in the darkness, cursing myself. She was under my protection, and I had not supposed my three years in the wilds had so entirely wiped out my training. I can see now I was unnecessarily harsh with myself, that I was young and meant no harm. Still I took myself to task seriously enough that night. When I went back and found her, still hooded, a pathetic and lonely little figure, I had no fine words. I kicked the turf and did manage to blurt out:

"That won't happen again. Don't bake your face with that hood." With that I went over by the horses and threw myself down.

Her cold voice cut like a knife as it followed me, saying—

"Having bought me, I suppose you believed you owned me."

I groaned and dug my fingers into my ears. Before I slept that night I knew I loved her and had spoiled everything by my unpardonable action.

THE MOUSE was conquered and we passed down the Assiniboin in two canoes obtained from Fort Assiniboin. I paddled one, and she and Flat Mouth paddled the other. I had attempted to renew our old footing as if nothing had happened, but the glance she gave me told me how hopeless it was. After that I met her only as we landed to make a camp at night, and then only as we ate our fish and meat. She no longer eyed me coldly, but stared at me without seeming to see me.

At the Forks we passed the camp of some H. B. men from the Albany factory. I waved my hand but did not turn in to join them. I had no heart for companionship. It was not until I was some miles up the Red that I observed the absence of the girl's canoe. It came in sight just as I had finished cooking and eating a fish and was resuming my journey. I knew she and the Pillager had turned in at the H. B. fire.

I forced myself to think of old Tabashaw

and to wonder if the old rascal had succeeded in bullying and coaxing all the rum from Probos. I repeatedly framed my report to the gentlemen of the North, trying to excuse my absence from my post and explain why the Spring hunt had resulted in a failure.

Then it came over me and nauseated me—homesickness. To remain there through the Summer, Fall and Winter and to see no white man's smoke until the next Summer seemed to be more than I could endure. All the way up the river I fought it over with myself. Then I realized how silly it was to try to keep the girl from my thoughts. I loved her. I would tell her so. At least she should know that much of the truth, even though she laughed at me. I believed I would feel better if I humiliated myself to her.

So, when I reached the stretch below the X. Y. post on the Scratching, where poles must be used instead of paddles, I stayed in camp and killed time until she and the Pillager came up. I thought she wanted him to go on, but, seeing me, he was eager to land. I greeted her and she eyed me blankly. I fidgeted and waited. Then I could not endure it longer. The Indian was some rods away, roasting some meat. I made sure of my position in my canoe, then turned to her and said:

"That time—back there—I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't loved you."

"Don't mention it," she politely replied, turning and walking to the fire.

"I won't again," I called after her, cursing myself for an addle-headed lout.

I sent my canoe into the stream and pitted my strength and sleepless mood against the river and the hours. More of a ghost than a man, I at last crawled ashore at the Pembina post at the edge of evening.

The old familiar drunken howls saluted me from the fort. I picked up two oak ax-helves, where some of the drunken beggars had thrown them, and tucked them under my arm. When I reached the stockade gate I heard old Tabashaw making a drunken speech and exhorting his tribesmen to enter the fort, find Probos and drag him from his hiding-place and cut his throat. I glanced up at the fort windows and saw Probos' fat, greasy face flabby with terror. Leaning my gun against the stockade, I took an oak helve in each hand and quietly stole upon the gathering.

Then did I put the fear of the *manito* into their souls. I waded back and forth cracking heads and upbraiding them for worthless dogs and concluded by getting old Tabashaw by the neck and kicking him outside the stockade. Probos, with tears running down his flaccid face, told me the Indians had grown to be very insolent; that his life was threatened every day. No trade had been brought in, as none of the hunters had gone out. It was believed the Sioux had killed me and the girl and the Pillager. On the morrow Tabashaw had proposed to raid the X. Y. post down the river and secure the supply of liquor. Then he proposed to burn all posts on the river.

Next morning I sent Probos back to the Red River and had the Indian women clean up the fort. I assessed every hunter in the camp with a debt of fifty skins to pay for the rum he had consumed, and told them they would not get any more until they squared their debts. For two weeks I worked with the devil riding me. I hated the thought of night and invented excuses to stay up and keep busy. The gardens had been sadly neglected and the women were kept at work tending these. The hunters were gradually cleared from the fort and the grounds until I had nothing to do but sit down and hate myself and the country. The Pillager had been but a poor companion after he joined me. He spent most of his time hunting buffaloes, and when we met he made no reference to Miss Dearness. I wouldn't ask him about her or affairs at the X. Y. post for anything, and he had to talk except concerning how fat the cows were and the like.

One day I walked down to the river, thinking to take my canoe and paddle up-stream and kill time. As I stood, trying to decide whether I really would go or not, a canoe rounded the bend down-stream and I could scarcely believe my eyes as I beheld the flaming torch of hair. I would not go up-stream as she was going in the same direction. She continued in the middle of the river, fighting the full force of the current. I stared straight ahead. She came abreast of me but did not appear to see me. Then, with a vicious cut of the paddle, she turned inshore and before I knew it was pulling her canoe up on the beach.

"You're not very neighborly," she quietly remarked, looking up into my face.

"I'm poor company," I replied.

"Well, I'm going away. I've brought you the keys to the post. Angus will stay there till you come to take over things."

"You going—" I whispered, feeling this was the end of the world.

"Going back East," she pleasantly explained. "The coalition doesn't seem to interest you."

I must have looked my stupidity, for she patiently explained:

"The N. W. and the X. Y. have joined forces. I'm to turn over everything to you."

"When did you learn this?" I cried.

"When I stopped at the H. B. camp at the Forks and found an X. Y. express there. He was on his way to me with a message from the X. Y. headquarters. Simon McTavish is dead. Sir Alexander McKenzie is now willing to combine. There is no X. Y. Company. It's the North West Company now."

This was astounding and most welcome news. It would make it possible for N. W. Northmen to bring the Indians back to their senses. I said—

"When do you go?"

"Soon. In a day or so. There's a Summer brigade coming down the Assiniboin. The Pillager is to paddle me to the Forks."

I rubbed my head and forced myself to reason a bit. Then I knew what had puzzled me and I asked—

"If you knew about the coalition when you reached the Forks, why did you keep on up to the X. Y. post and wait two weeks before telling me?"

She turned away abruptly, with more of her aloofness, I assumed. I stepped out on the strip of sand and picked up the paddle she had dropped. Then, turning, I surprized her stealing a glance at me. Never could a Sioux knife in grating through my ribs give me such a pang as did sight of the two tears rolling down her cheeks.

I gaped, then seized her hand and waited a second to make sure my medicine was right. She did not offer to draw away. Very slowly I drew her to me.

"What made it wrong the other time was because you hadn't first told me that you loved me," she whispered.

A BROWN river rushed over the southern horizon, dotted with the brown carcasses of its shaggy victims, bringing the breath of menace from the country of the Sioux, where the opportune coming of the Lewis and Clark expedition up the Missouri gave me my chance to help the English girl. She always held it was not right—the way the fur trade was conducted. And I always sat silent and let her have her own way of thinking. As I grew older I realized it was a beautiful way she had of thinking. Being a Northman, I didn't agree with her in my thoughts. But now, since she's gone away on the river that is always calling, I wonder.

THE END

NUMBER TEN BOOTS

by

HAPSBURG LIEBE

Author of "Godfather to Satan's Kitchen," "The Last Joke of Joker Joe," etc.

ALL the cattle-ranches in the world are not in the western half of the United States, nor are all the pines and palmettos of the United States in Florida. You might keep this in mind.

Connie Switser was a crook, a thin and pale, cunning little crook, twenty-one years old. He had nicknames, half a dozen of them, but they need not be mentioned here; all of them, however, suggested his likeness, in one way or another, to that member of the rodent family known familiarly as the rat. Connie always lived in the present; the past was forever gone, and the future was, to him, a distinctly uncertain quantity.

At the moment, little Switser was lounging on a much-whittled wooden bench just under the open front window of the sheriff's office in a small, pine-scented town named Dale. Unless it was because the vicinity of the sheriff's office seemed safer for him than anywhere else, he had no special reason for being at that particular place. Connie was almost too sick to get out of town. He hadn't been well for a year, which explains the basic why of his sojourn in this land of gentle atmosphere and no twilight to speak of.

The rays of the declining sun annoyed him and he sat up. At that instant his eye fell upon the lithe and rounded figure of a young woman in the flower-filled front yard of a cottage across the sandy street. She was gathering an armful of red and white roses. Connie Switser had always looked upon women as necessary evils, like big feet and chimneys, and he had always turned up his nose at them, but this one—he grudgingly told himself that this one was all to the mustard and he was in no way mistaken. He never could understand his strange, quick liking for the rose lady, nor could anybody else, perhaps. If only he were a man as other men, he told himself, he——

"Say, you!"

A big and blue-shirted arm came through the open window behind him, and a big and sun-browned hand dropped to his shoulder. He turned his tousled head and looked straight into the serious blue eyes of heavily-built, middle-aged Sheriff Bill Maddon.

"Dale," Maddon went on, "ain't never been fond o' tramps and I sure ain't in any prayerful humor. Where's your visible means o' support?"

Connie sneered openly. Not that he minded being looked upon as a common tramp. In point of fact, it suited him very well to be looked upon as a tramp. It was in the blood and bone of Connie Switser to sneer at officers. The com-

posite mass of the officers of everywhere formed his great and relentless enemy.

"Aw, don't take it so hard," he clipped. His voice would have been shrill, had it not been so weak. "I ain't been in the habit o' carryin' my stocks and bonds with me. Honest, I'm a rich Irish count in disguise. I just wanted to rest here for a minute or two, bo. I'm waitin' for my Rolls-Royce; the chofers you get now ain't to be depended on, o' course. Cain't you have a little bit of a heart? You can tell without lookin' I'm sicker'n a dog."

The latter sentence was only too true, and Maddon saw it at once. Maddon withdrew his hand, the hand of the law; then he put a silver dollar on the window-sill between them. This sheriff was locally famous for his share of the thing we call sporting blood. Back in Kentucky he had lost a good farm in a bet on a county election. He owned a pair of ears on another man's head; he won them in a bet on a horse-race in Kentucky. Maddon, bantered sufficiently, would bet anything he had.

"This dollar might help. Stay here the rest o' the day if you feel like it," he said slowly.

Connie glanced at the coin; then he looked the sheriff straight in the eye again and twisted his thin lips into something that was deeper and more full of meaning than a mere sneer. To him, Maddon was not just Maddon; Maddon represented his great and relentless enemy.

"Keep your pin-money," he replied, still with his thin lips twisted. "My chofer's comin' by way o' the bank and he's bringin' me a couple o' hundred thousand—my Rolls-Royce chofer. Say, did you ever see one o' them Rolls-Royces?"

Maddon soberly shook his head. Maddon did soberly anything he did at all.

"It's a automob'le a hundred yards long with a steerin'-wheel on both ends," little Switser ran on. "Two decks to it, like a ship. I'll take you," he finished with a grandiose gesture, "to Yurrope with me sometime."

The crook turned from the window and his gaze once more sought that entrancing vision of femininity in the flower-filled yard across the street. She was standing beside a bougainvillea now, with a sheaf of fragrant roses in her arms.

After a moment of staring solemnly at Switser's back, Sheriff Bill Maddon shook his head, went to his scarred roll-top desk and sat down. The young woman went into the house and Connie frowned unconsciously when his eyes beheld her no longer. Then Connie stretched himself out on the bench again and pulled his slouch hat over his face to shut out a vagrant ray of sunlight.

A FEW minutes afterward a man drove up in an orange-colored buckboard drawn by a pair of half-wild, sun-scalded, young sorrel horses. He was not more than twenty-five, tall and strong, good-looking enough and tanned most beautifully. He wore the laced boots, broad gray hat and khaki of a palmetto-land rancher or cowman. Connie Switser had seen him before, and one of his slyly peeping eyes recognized him now. It was "Rancher Tom" Alden of the Rancho Alden, which was on a big, slow river two miles west of Dale.

Rancher Tom sprang from the vehicle and tied the reins to a peg of the hitching-rack. He glanced at Connie, who appeared to be sleeping as soundly as a boulder, and strode into Maddon's office. Maddon went to his feet and the two men stood there staring at each other with the tiniest possible suggestion of anger in their eyes.

The little crook sat up noiselessly, watched and listened. It was the sheriff who broke the silence.

"I wouldn't get all worked up like that over it, Rancher. What is it?"

Rancher Tom flushed and paled. He was hot-headed at times and this was one of the times. Rarely or never before had he forgotten himself as he forgot himself now. Connie Switser's lady of the roses was Alden's sweetheart, and that same estimable little lady was Sheriff Bill Maddon's one and only pet daughter.

"Same old thing!" blurted Alden. "More cattle gone without a hoof-print behind 'em; disappeared the same as if the earth swallowed 'em. No fences down. All gates locked, and no cow-tracks anywhere near 'em. And," he went on, narrowing his gray eyes at the

officer, "there's the same foot-prints of a man who wears number ten boots!"

Bill Maddon stiffened perceptibly at the insinuation against his ability as an officer, for it amounted to exactly that, as he saw it. He had tried, and tried with diligence, to catch the mysterious rustler, the man of the number ten boots, and he had failed miserably. He didn't speak. Tom Alden continued:

"Suppose you authorize me, deputize me to catch the thief, eh, Bill? I'll lay you a bet that I can do it!"

"You'll lay me a bet that you can catch the thief?" rumbled Maddon. He frowned hard. His blood was up now. "Just what are you willin' to bet, Rancher? How big a sport are you, anyhow?"

Alden straightened. His blood, too, was up. It was up so high that it almost made him dizzy.

"All I've got in the world is my ranch," said he. "I'll bet you that!"

It was rather staggering. Maddon sank an inch or two, studied the floor at his feet, rubbed his somewhat stubbly brown chin thoughtfully, then looked back to his visitor.

"You know, Tom," he muttered, "that I ain't got anything much except my house and the sheriff's job. I couldn't bet you the job, o' course. The little house ain't wo'th anywhere near as much as your ranch. You wouldn't want my right arm—though if you won it, you'd sure get it. What have I got that you'd like to see me put up against your precious palmetto land, Rancher?"

Something in the tones of his voice made Alden a little ashamed that he had been hasty and more or less unwise. It was true, and he knew it, that Maddon owned no property except his cottage home across the sandy street. Then a brilliant thought rose to the surface of the brain of Rancher Tom and he put it into words forthwith.

"Look here, Bill, I've asked you a dozen times for your girl, and you've always refused me—for no reason on earth that I could see. She'd marry me, Bill, if you'd let her. I'd be good to her. You know that. I'll put up my ranch and all there is on it, cows and horses and houses and everything else, against her, in a bet that I can stick iron bracelets on the big rustler that's been takin' my cattle, and do it in thirty days! On honor. No papers and no publicity. I'm a gentleman and so are you. Not a soul but you and me, Bill, shall know anything about it. What do you say?"

Connie the crook had not missed a word of any of it. He winked inwardly at himself, so to speak, and smiled.

Maddon was silent. Alden pursued:

"Come across with the answer, Bill. I want to see how much of the game-cock there is in you!"

Suddenly Bill Maddon shot out his hand and Rancher Tom gripped it.

"On honor and no papers," said the sheriff. "Also, no publicity. I wouldn't have it talked for anything. If you win my girl, Tom, you sure can have her, and if you don't, you sure cain't. If I win your ranch, I'm goin' to take it and I'm goin' to keep it, too. Do you understand me, Tom?"

"My understandin' is perfect," smiled Rancher Tom. "Pin a deputy's badge on my shirt, put a .45 gun on me and swear me in, and after that you can go to gettin' ready to give the bride away!"

Connie smirked a long smirk while the little swearing-in ceremony was taking place.

AS Rancher Tom turned for the doorway he caught sight of that pale, half-emaciated face just above the window-ledge. Connie's smirk faded and his eyes sharpened. Alden took three quick steps across the floor, seized little Switser by a shoulder and drew him through the window.

"Eavesdropper!" he snapped, shaking Connie and facing Maddon at the same time. "It's no secret, Bill; this tramp heard everything!"

Maddon's brows knitted; he bit his lower lip. Switser sneered wickedly. Alden shook Switser again.

"What are we goin' to do with him, Bill? By George, he sure knows! Could we jail him for a month and pay him for his time?"

"That wouldn't keep his mouth shut," growled Maddon, "and I've got no grounds for jailin' him, Tom. Handle the matter yourself. You made the trade—no publicity, you know. It ain't so awful important; still, everybody's busi-

ness ain't anybody's business, and this is a private matter if ever there was one. I—I knowed he was there but I forgot it, Tom."

"Handle it myself, you say?"

Alden turned back to Switser. Alden had an idea.

"Listen to me, son," he said to Connie. "I hereby invite you to spend about four weeks as my honored guest out at Rancho Alden and I also advise you to accept the invite. There ain't anybody but me and the boys and the black cook. There'll be plenty o' grub and plenty o' fishin'. Do you accept or not?"

"S'posen," flared Connie, "I don't? What'll you do about it?"

All the masterfulness in Rancher Tom came to the fore then. He looked Connie the crook squarely and narrowly in the eye for almost a minute before he spoke again.

"I think," said he, "you'll accept. I'm ready to go. Are you?"

A peculiar light flitted across Switser's half-bloodless face.

"Yes," he answered, "I'm ready. Buy me some smoke-sticks, will you? I ain't had one today."

Alden and Bill Maddon exchanged glances; then Alden and Switser walked together out of the office. Another moment and they were in the buckboard flying toward a small store the length of a block up the street. Rancher Tom bought a dozen packages of cigarets for his seatmate. Switser began to smoke like a burning brush-pile as they started for the Rancho Alden.

As they were about to pass Bill Maddon's cottage, Switser noted that the rose lady stood at the gate. He noted also that she was smiling at Rancher Tom; it was a fulsome smile, a winning smile—it was a great deal more than that, and Connie was human enough to understand. Something akin to jealous rage rose within Switser then, but he knew in his soul that anything like that was far worse than hopeless, so he swallowed his feelings quickly and forevermore.

Alden raised his hat, spoke and drove on. Switser watched to see whether the rose lady's eyes followed them and saw that they did. Then Connie turned to the big ranchman at his side.

"Who is she?" he wanted to know.

"Sheriff Maddon's girl."

"Oh, so that's the one he's bettin' against your measly ranch. He's bettin' odds all right!"

"Yes," nodded Tom Alden, "that's the one, and you sure better not say anything about it. Get me?"

"I foller."

Connie was now glowering at the sorrels. As the daughter of one of the laws' representatives, she belonged in the enemy's camp, and yet the poor girl couldn't help it. One could not always choose one's parents, of course. In the deepest analysis it did not lessen one whit his queer little idolatry for the lady of the roses.

"What's her name, Rancher?" he made bold to ask.

"Alice."

They drove in silence for a few minutes, Alden holding his horses to a trot by keeping the reins always taut. Then Connie spoke again—

"I don't blame you for likin' her, Rancher."

"Everybody," said Alden, "likes Alice. You do that just the same as you like sunshine. I'd a little rather, son," he continued soberly, "that you wouldn't mention her to me any more."

It was because he did not wish to discuss her with a man of Switser's caliber, and Switser knew it just as well as Rancher Tom knew it. Switser's lips tightened, curled bitterly and parted.

"You go to the devil," he clipped.

"Thanks." Tom Alden smiled. "What's your name, son?"

There was no answer.

The ranchman studied his companion's pale face out of the tail of his eye. Connie seemed intent upon watching the pine-straw road ahead of them, which ran through a palmetto-filled wilderness of tall pines that were draped in streamers of funeral-gray Spanish mosses. A pair of partridges whirred up suddenly from almost under the front feet of the sorrels and the horses plunged, rendering it difficult for Connie to keep his place on the buckboard's seat. Alden sawed on the reins and checked the animals easily. The crook was compelled to give him a glance of admiration for his enviable strength.

Soon they drew up before a gate in a

wire fence a hundred yards from the ranch-house. Rancher Tom passed the reins to Switser.

"The gate's too heavy for you," he said. "It drags. You can drive through and then stop for me. Hold 'em tight, son. They're all fire and brimstone. That's their names, 'Fire' and 'Brimstone.'"

Connie's fingers closed mechanically on the long strips of leather. Alden stepped out of the vehicle, ran to the gate and swung it open. One of the posts was a lightning-riven and much decayed pine tree; the other was a sapling oak.

"Get up, you pair o' Dobbins!" cried Switser, shaking the reins.

The sorrels didn't move. Before Alden could call out a warning, Switser foolishly snatched the whip from its socket and struck the horses hard.

Fire and Brimstone leaped madly. There was a splintering crash of collision mingled with a cry from the throat of Rancher Tom, and Connie was thrown violently, head foremost, over the dashboard. There came another splintering crash and a great weight bore Switser hard down on his face. He heard sounds of vicious and rapid blows, then an ear-splitting roar, and after that the bright afternoon sun seemed to Connie to go out like a candle smothered in a gale.

THE house at the Rancho Alden was not an elaborate thing but it was big and comfortable, having been built with an eye to the time when it would in all probability be occupied by more than a mere man and his black cook. It was a low structure after an old Spanish style, with a *patio* or court in the center and a veranda running entirely around the outside. Lines of tall and beautful cabbage-palms shaded the veranda, and two of these same cool, green trees grew in the *patio*.

Night had fallen when Connie Switser came to himself again. He was lying abed in the house at the Rancho Alden, and Rancher Tom and a wizened little doctor from Dale were standing beside him. A burning oil-lamp on the dresser made a dim and yellow light in the room.

The first word the injured man heard the doctor say was not altogether pleasing to him.

"Dissipation," that was it.

"It ain't anything to you!" said Switser weakly but with much bad spirit. He looked toward Alden and, remembering something of the wreck of the buckboard, went on sourly:

"Didn't quite get me killed, did you? Better luck next time! You might try shootin' or poisonin'. Say, did you save my coffin-nails?"

Rancher Tom was silent for a full minute. When he spoke, he said simply—

"I saved your coffin-nails."

"I want one and I want it right now."

Alden turned questioning eyes toward the doctor. The doctor shrugged.

"Might as well—but give him only one for tonight."

The owner of the Rancho Alden faced about and beckoned, and a huge, youngish man in boots and khaki, whose sunburn amounted almost to the hue of weathered copper, came from somewhere in the shadows.

"Open the package on the table in the livin'-room, Bud," he ordered, his voice heavy with mingled pity, contempt and exasperation, "and bring this rat a cigaret."

The big cowman hastened away and returned shortly. He delivered the cigaret, scratched a match on the floor and held the tiny flame a convenient distance from Switser's mouth. Connie put the cigaret between his lips but he did not light it just then. He seemed to have developed a curious interest in the cowman's burly countenance. Then Switser turned half over in bed and looked at the cowman's laced boots. They were big ones and not a number smaller than ten.

The match went out. The man in the big boots poised another.

"Say when," he growled.

"When," clipped little Switser.

The match became a flame and Connie lighted his coffin-nail.

The doctor and Rancher Tom went into the living-room. Rancher Tom carried himself stiffly and limped badly. The cowman sat down in a straight-backed chair and eyed the crook narrowly as he inhaled and exhaled cloud

after cloud of tobacco smoke. Switser soon learned that he was being thus closely watched and he flared up hotly—

"I sure hope you'll know me next time you see me!"

"I will, all right," was the easy reply. "What's your name, son?"

"None o' your business. What's yours?"

"Bud Ketcham."

"Mine's Cain't Ketch 'Em," quirked Connie. "Say, you've got an awful foot. I'm goin' to call you 'Number Ten Boots.'"

"And I'm goin' to call you 'Rat o' the Rancho.'"

Connie darkened even more. Those rat nicknames annoyed him.

"If I was as big as you do you know what I'd do?" he asked suddenly. "I'd beat you up, that's what. Say, Number Ten Boots, did you ever steal cattle?"

"Steal cattle!" It was Ketcham's turn to darken and he certainly did it. "Who says I stole cattle?"

Switser took a parting puff at his cigaret and deftly snapped it straight through the open doorway that led to the living-room.

"Bull's-eye!" he observed. "Oh, nobody says it. I just wondered. Bring me another smoke-stick, Number Ten Boots."

Bud Ketcham rose with not very much grace and went for it. Rancher Tom met him at the table. The doctor had gone.

"Another cigaret already?" Alden frowned. "Not on your life, bud—no more until morning. Better stay with him until midnight and don't leave him then if he ain't restin' easy and sleepin' sound. I'm in the left front bedroom, if you want me. Good-night."

He limped away. Ketcham went back to Switser's bedside and sat down.

"Rancher says there ain't nothin' doin'," he told Connie, "until broad daylight in the mornin'."

"The big rube!" cried Switser. "He——"

"Aw, shet up," Ketcham broke in. "You make me tired. You don't know what you're talkin' about, Rat. Rancher done several things for you that I wouldn't ha' done."

The little crook sneered.

"Why, Number Ten! Oh, dear—and you lovin' me the way you do! It's awful touchin'. What was it he done, anyway?"

BUD Ketcham bent forward, his elbows on his knees.

"You hit them fool sorrels when you was drivin' through the gate—remember? They jumped and smashed the left front wheel on that rotten snag pine; then they hung the left hind wheel against the tree and pulled it right down on you and the buckboard, smashin' it to splinters. One o' them sorrels, Brimstone, the worst one, he got all tangled in the wire o' the fence and fell down. There he laid, kickin' twenty kicks to the second and hittin' the tree half an inch from your head every time. You was layin' under the tree with blood runnin' out your mouth.

"So what does Rancher do?" the cowman continued. "He runs in and the hoss soaks him half a dozen licks that would ha' busted your pecan-shell head. It sure looked like certain death and I don't yet see why it wasn't. He's bruised blue and black all over. Notice how he walked? Then he had to take out that gun Bill Maddon put on him and shoot the Brimstone hoss to save you. Why, Rat o' the Rancho, that hoss, low-down mean as he was, was wo'th a heap more'n you!

"Then Rancher, what does he do? He lifts that tree off o' you, carries you here and sends me cuttin' the buck after the doctor. And that pine snag was some heavy, too, Rat. I tried to lift it myself when I'd got back from Dale, and I sure couldn't! All o' them things he done for you, Rat, when it was your own fault. Now you got the nerve to call him a 'big rube!' It ain't right, by jingoes, it ain't right!"

Connie Switser's eyes searched the heavy, copper-brown countenance of his temporary nurse for some sign of a lie. He found none. Ketcham had given a modest enough account of the accident.

Switser turned his face from the yellow-flamed lamp and was silent for a long time. It was a strange thing, an almost unbelievable thing, a thing unheard of in all his life before, that a man whom he hardly knew had shot to death

a valuable horse, taken severe punishment, even narrowly risked his own life, to save him—him, a little, mean, worthless crook.

When he awoke, day had broken. He could hear the quarreling of jays, the chattering of cat-squirrels, the melody of a mockingbird. He saw that the lamp on the dresser was still lighted and then he saw that Rancher Tom dozed in a chair beside him. Connie resisted temptation for about the first time in his life and did not wake Alden to ask him for a cigaret.

For half an hour, Switser watched the ranchman closely and thought and thought, over and over again, of the vast difference between them and of that which the ranchman had done to save his miserable life. Then Tom Alden stirred, yawned, sat up stiffly in his chair and looked toward the slender figure in bed.

"Good mornin', son," he said cheerily. "How you feelin'? Black Isham's goin' to give us some pancakes and real 'ham-and' for breakfast. Reckon you can eat some?"

Connie actually grinned.

"Man, whisper it sweet and low! Eat some? I ain't had a square in a year, honest. I'm feelin' pretty good—all but I'm sore across my shoulders. Say, I thought that Ketcham feller was settin' up with me, and it's you."

"I couldn't sleep," was Alden's explanation.

Connie's face became sober again.

"How come it, Rancher," he asked pointedly, "you done what you done for me?"

"Any man owes a debt like that to humanity." Alden smiled a little. "Judgin' by the smells that's comin' from the kitchen, you'd better get up if you feel like it; if you don't, I'll bring your breakfast to you."

Connie Switser rose.

An hour later Switser walked weakly out toward the barns and bunk-houses and came upon the ranchman giving orders to Bud Ketcham and another cowman, both of whom were mounted. Ketcham glared wickedly at Switser and Switser deliberately made a face at Ketcham. Alden finished his talk and turned to Connie. The cowmen whirled away.

"So long, Number Ten Boots!" taunted Connie.

Ketcham pretended that he didn't hear. Alden's brows puckered.

"What's the big idee, son?" asked Alden.

"He wears number ten boots," Connie said with about a fourth of a smile. "You found the tracks o' that sort o' boots every time you lost cattle, you said."

"Think it was Bud, eh?"

"Oh, no, I ain't thinkin' at all. All the same, that big soak wears number ten boots! Say, Rancher, does Ketcham know you found them big footprints when your cattle turned up missin'?"

"No! Except for tellin' Bill Maddon, I've kept it to myself," answered Rancher Tom. He shook his head and went on: "It wasn't Bud, son. He's been with me for three years and he's a good man. I sure couldn't suspicion him. There's more men than just Bud that wears number ten boots in this country, son. What made you think it was him?"

"I've seen lots o' crooks, Rancher," Connie muttered. "There's somethin' about 'em you get to know when you see it. When I first laid eyes on Bud, I says to myself, I says: 'There's a feller who's so crooked he cain't lay still in his sleep,' I says. I couldn't never tell you why, but that's the way I felt about it. Anyhow, you watch him! You sure got to ketch the thief in thirty days, Rancher, or lose a lot!"

"Lose a lot!" echoed Alden. "I'd say! You keep quiet about it, son, hear me?"

Connie smiled.

"Quiet! Rancher, I'm a tombstone."

DAYS and days passed, and more and more cattle disappeared. There was no trace of their going save for a few big, dim footprints in the sand. Had they been snatched up at night by some monster ship of the air, it could hardly have been more mystifying. Tom Alden watched by day and he watched by night and he rode the country over in the attempt to find which way his cattle had gone, all to no avail. Connie Switser, too, did a great deal of watching and

with no more success than attended the efforts of Alden.

The common dislike between the big cowman, Ketcham, and the little erstwhile crook had grown into a cordial hatred. Once it would have reached bloodshed, doubtless, had not Rancher Tom interfered. Ketcham had drawn back one of his huge legs to give Connie the feel of a number ten boot, when Alden caught the burly cowman by the shirt-collar and fairly lifted him off his feet. It was this final touch that changed Switser's admiration for Alden into nothing less than idolatry. From that hour on, Switser followed Rancher Tom like a dog.

The twenty-ninth day dawned and the rustler was still uncaught. Alden tried to hide his disappointment and couldn't. When he had finished his breakfasting, he went into the big, plain living-room and walked the floor with folded arms, drawn brows and a face as grave as death itself. He didn't dread losing his ranch nearly so much as he dreaded losing the girl—that was the insufferable part of it. Alice certainly would not marry him without her father's permission. Bill Maddon had only her.

He became aware that a pair of keen eyes were watching him from the front doorway and he wheeled irritably.

"Well," he snapped, "what is it, Connie?"

Connie walked in. He now wore a shirt and trousers of khaki; they had been Alden's and Black Isham had boiled them and boiled them until they had shrunk almost to a fit. One of Alden's old broad-rimmed gray hats sat ludicrously on the back of his head.

"When you ketch him, Rancher," muttered Connie, his voice sympathy itself, "you'll ketch him at night. There's one more night left."

"Yes," gloomily replied Tom Alden, "and it'll be just like all the rest o' the nights."

"There ain't any tellin'. Why, Rancher, you've got to get him! You simply cain't lose!"

Alden's smile was poor indeed.

"Real pretty," said he, "to talk about. Different when it comes to doin' it."

Switser jerked his thin shoulders up.

"I thought," he said, "you was a real sport. Real sports lives until they dies, Rancher. You try this one more night, Rancher, and you try like the devil."

The face of Tom Alden went a little ashen with a touch of anger.

"You ain't got any kick comin', Connie," said he. "You've took on about fifteen pounds weight since you been here and you're goin' to get plumb well. What kick have you got, Connie?"

"Since I commenced eatin' ham-and and breathin' air instead o' cigaret smoke, yes," nodded Connie. "But I ain't talkin' about me. I'm talkin' about you. You fight the fight right on out, Rancher. You be a real sport.

"You go to bed early tonight like you was sick; then you sneak out and take up the watch over your cattle and I bet you'll have the irons on Bud Ketcham before daylight!"

The spirit of the smaller man was helpful. Alden stiffened himself and smiled at little Switser.

"I wouldn't have throwed it up anyhow—not until the last minute was gone, son," he said, "though I appreciate your int'rest. If I win, you've got a lifetime job here at Rancho Alden, if you want it."

"I want it," Connie said quickly.

Early that night Switser told the cowmen that Alden had gone to bed all tuckered out and didn't want to be bothered, which wasn't all falsehood, and immediately afterward went to his own bed. Half an hour later Rancher Tom crept from the house and went toward his cattle.

He had hardly entered the palmettos when Connie, armed with a shotgun, himself crept from the house. Connie did not attempt to follow Alden. Two men at different points, Switser figured, could do twice as much toward spotting the rustler as two men at one point. He took up watch a little way from Alden—across the sea of palmettos.

During all the long hours of that night he neither saw nor heard anything out of the ordinary. He watched the dawn come, quickly as it always came, with a sinking feeling in his breast. Tom had lost, for this had been the last night. Had he caught the thief, there would have been a noise, of course.

At daybreak Switser slipped back to

the Rancho Alden's big house and peered through a dining-room window. Alden sat at the table with a cup of coffee in his hand; his eyes were fixed stolidly on some object on the other side of the room. Connie thrust the shotgun under the house and went unseen back to the palmettos. He felt that it would be better if he didn't face Rancher Tom just then.

He crept deep into the shade, stretched himself out on the carpet of soft pine needles, went to sleep and dreamed finally that he was a pall-bearer at the rose lady's funeral.

SWITSER sat up with a start, his brow flecked with cold perspiration. The rose lady! He hadn't forgotten the little lady of the roses. It was then that he thought of the way out. It was a hard way out, but it was the only way. He'd have to be a man of courage, like Rancher Tom or Bill Maddon, if he did it.

He decided that he would do it. It was as much for the sake of the rose lady as it was for Rancher Tom. The plan came to his mind complete from the first. There was nothing to finish, nothing to think out. He went to the big house and found Black Isham tidying the living-room.

"Where's Rancher?" he asked.

"Misto Alden," Black Isham answered promptly and very pompously, "he have done gone to Dale, suh, on biz'ness. He driv the new yallah hoss and the old one and he tole me to have dinnah ready at one o'clock shahp, suh."

Gone to throw it up, Connie told himself. Gone to give over all he had on earth. Gone to pay his bet like a gentleman. Connie jumped. He looked at the face of the nickel-plated alarm clock on the table. It was then half-past twelve; he had until four of that afternoon before the thirty days would be done.

As he turned for the front door he heard footsteps on the veranda just beyond it. He opened the door and there stood Rancher Tom. He drew Alden in and rushed him to the privacy of the left front bedroom. Once there, he turned and faced the wondering ranchman.

"Good old Tom," he said feelingly, "it was you teached me to be a game-cock. I sure cain't bear it to treat you so low-down mean. You ain't failed to ketch the rustler, Tom. You've got him right now and it ain't too late. It was me! I wore a pair o' number ten boots to fool you! Take me to Bill Maddon and the jail, Tom. It's all off. You ain't lost the ranch nor the rose lady. Put your irons on me, Tom, before I change my mind and run!"

He held out his arms, but Tom Alden had no irons for those slender wrists of Switser's. He took Connie's hands in his and looked, his eyes brighter than new gold, toward the open doorway. Connie's gaze followed Alden's. There stood Bill Maddon and the little lady of the roses, and they were quite dressed up.

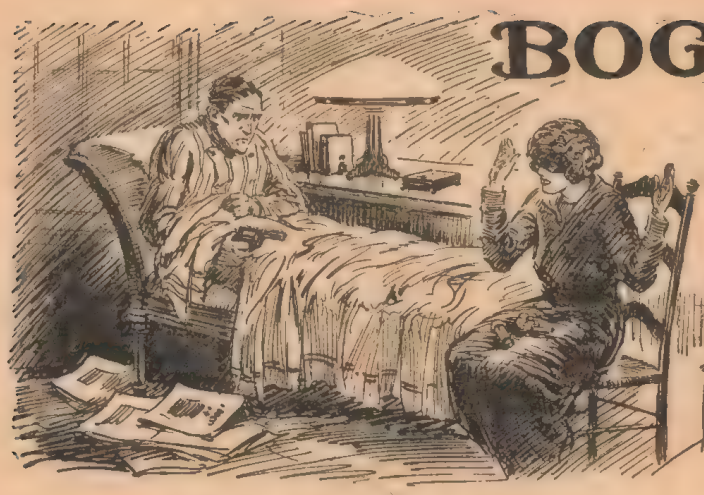
"Did you hear that?" smiled Rancher Tom. "Bill Maddon, when it comes to sporting blood, you and me ain't anything but pikers. This little man here, he's the real sport of us all, all right. You understand it, Alice, don't you?"

Alice did understand fully. She went straight to Switser and kissed him, her lips tremulous, on the forehead. Connie swayed at the sweetness of it.

"What's the matter, Rancher? What does it mean, anyhow?"

"It means," quietly answered Tom Alden, "that I caught Bud Ketcham—I was awful su'prized—drivin' off cattle last night. He drove 'em down the edge o' the river, where the water would wash out their tracks, to a couple o' pals. And it means, fu'thermore, that Bud is in jail and I'm a married man and the good woman who just kissed you out o' the fulness o' her heart is my cherished wife.

"The only thing I regret about it, son, is that I didn't have you for a best man at the weddin'. Surely to goodness you're the only man in this part o' the country that's got any real right to wear number ten boots."



BOGUS GEMS

by

GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Gaboreao the Terrible," "Born to Be Hanged But—, etc.

I HEARD a noise at the door and sat quietly. I recognized it as the faint sound of sensitive fingers trying a skeleton key.

The room was dark and it was one of the so-called wee sma' hours when even those with uneasy consciences are supposed to be asleep and when, as if to establish a compensating ratio, even the faintest of noises, the little creaks and rustles that are scarcely audible in daylight, are as noticeable to a listener as the clatter of bronze.

Not having much humor, I did not call out an invitation to come in. Besides, the person in the hall seemed already determined on that. As I was not in bed, but had dozingly remained on the *chaise-longue* when I turned out the reading-lamp by my side, I saw no reason at all for disturbing my visitor's entrance.

I was not surprized that some one, uninvited and at such an hour, should try to come. Not that I had been waiting for such a one. Not at all. It would have taken more to keep me awake than the fear that somebody might steal the black jewel-casket from off my table. Sleep does not come easily to me, nor remain long. I was in pajamas, with a blanket thrown over my legs, and I had, with a great show of patience, been offering myself to what the poets call Morpheus. I do not want anybody to think that worry or anything of the sort kept the bewitching kindness of sleep from my eyes, nor am I a sufferer from insomnia. I don't sleep much; that is all. I am not a sufferer from anything, unless it be the meddlesomeness of people who misjudge me. One of those who were misjudging me seemed to be at the door then, trying the unresisting lock.

II.

PERHAPS I would do well to pause and say a word about the casket. It did not belong to me. But I had as good right to it as the man I took it from. His name was Blackstone. He was a newcomer to San Francisco, but the police of very few if any cities knew about him. Not that he was clever. No. He was handsome, or not handsome exactly, but he had much about him that fascinated women. He was skilful at compromising women, then heartless in making them pay. So he had a good income, money in the bank, and posed as a gentleman.

It was very foolish of him to come to me, though he did not know that I knew all about how he had tried to get me into trouble a year before in New York. He was two-faced and treacherous, as men who fascinate women usually are. Among the things he had said was that the man who killed me would never be brought to trial—which may possibly be true. When one has the undeservedly notorious reputation of gambler and gunman, such as mine, the law is not likely to be very excited over the way he meets death. Blackstone had gone so far as to say that some day he was going to "get"

me. The man who has lived as I have lived is likely to be made a target at any time and without being so very fearless he may get more or less used to the danger, as soldiers in a way get used to snipers.

I did not like Blackstone and he was aware of it, so he took that comparatively safe means of getting a little revenge and was comfortable in the belief that I knew nothing of how he sometimes talked. To my face he was always friendly. I waited patiently. There is nothing quarrelsome about me. If he wanted to seem to be friendly when an icicle would have been more attentive to him, I could afford to watch him and wait.

I came back to San Francisco and would have forgotten him had he not, about a year afterward, dropped in on me with a casket full of gems.

I shall make the incident brief: He wanted me to give him several thousand dollars for the lot. I was not interested. His offer dropped and dropped until it came down to a price I really could have afforded to pay. But I do not buy stolen gems—or any other kind. I never bought a piece of ornamental jewelry in my life. He said that he was a stranger and did not know how to go about disposing of the gems, and all that sort of thing, but I was a friend and he would give me a good bargain.

The casket was slightly larger than an ordinary cigar-box, very heavily made, solid, peculiarly so, but a rather plain-looking box—that is, not ornamented in any way beyond a monogram of letters that I made out to be M. C. I knew nothing of jewel-caskets, but this one seemed to me thick enough to have served for a kind of strong-box, except that it had the flimsiest of locks.

I suppose that I would at once have sent Blackstone coldly on his way, but it happened that a friend of mine dropped in. He was a little nervous dope-fiend who knew a great deal about gems, as every successful pickpocket must. He took a glance at the glittering trinkets and cheerfully called them a fine assortment of "glass"; upon being pressed for further information he declared that the stones were really very good paste.

At once it became clear that Blackstone had tried to fleece me. Perhaps it had appealed to his sense of vanity to think that he could put something over on me. He knew gems, though if in a hurry he might snatch up a false one by mistake.

I was entirely polite, but Mr. Blackstone departed without his casket—or anything to console him for its loss.

I thought the incident closed, but a day or so later he telephoned demanding the casket. The conversation was brief: I said "good-by" and hung up.

He ventured to come to see me and offered a lot of money for the casket. I told him to go to the devil.

My room was burglarized, but the burglar neglected to look behind the bath-tub.

He wrote me a threatening letter and I began to be interested. Then he telephoned to say that I was a tin-horn, a coward and many other things and that I had hid the casket for fear somebody would take it away from me. Before hanging up I assured him that the casket and the gems would be on my table every night from the time I came into the room and I suggested that he call.

I never expected to see him. But somebody was at the door, coming in.

III

SOME sense, neither sight nor hearing perhaps, but something such as warns a person when somebody stands noiselessly behind him, told me when the door was opened.

The person was using extreme caution. That was wise. True, it might be a random burglar stumbling, so to speak, against my door and hoping to carry off something besides a bullet or two in his legs, but any one who came knowingly into my room would expect the bullet to reach a more fatal place than legs.

A soft, almost noiseless footstep crept on to the carpet. Then another and another. I could hear the faint, nervous breathing of the form almost within hand's touch of me. A pause in movement. I waited. I was not excited. I had no reason to be: the cards were all in my favor. True enough, some people do grow agitated when four aces fall to them. I am not one of those people.

I waited with my fingers motionless against the little brass chain of the light on the stand beside my chair.

In those days, and sometimes in these, I would about as soon have my five fingers, my hand, cut off and mislaid as to have a gun beyond reach. As it was, I was fully satisfied with the situation. The only trouble about shooting is that it makes a noise and people come to ask questions.

A sheaf of spreading light thrust itself out from the electric torch my visitor carried and fell on the empty bed; simultaneously I pulled the lamp's cord and with some effort to be calmly polite said—

"Won't you sit down?"

A smothered, futilely strangled little cry of fright—and the woman, a masked woman, with hands that gripped the torch and a small gun pressed in sudden alarm against her bosom, stepped stumblingly back. The eyes shot gleamingly through the mask-slits at me.

"Push the door to, please," I said pleasantly, trying to speak as naturally as one might under normal conditions to a not unwelcome stranger.

I was not going to let her know that I was as much surprized as herself.

She stepped slightly to one side and closed the door without taking her eyes off me.

"I very nearly grew tired of waiting for you. Please sit down."

I courteously indicated a chair near me.

She approached the chair with slow, trance-like movements, her eyes fixed on my face as if hypnotized. She was momentarily bewildered. That was all that was the matter with her. Surprize can deliver a blow scarcely less numbing than a club.

She recovered rapidly, however, if not from the surprize, at least from the appearance of it.

She sat down with a certain feline care, a suggestion of—I don't know just how to word the impression I got, but I will say that she sat down with a suggestion of daintiness. She tried to convey, and nearly succeeded, that she was not at all uneasy; yet she did not assume any boldness or even nonchalance.

I could not see much of her face, for she wore a mask, a domino, a black piece of silk that hid her forehead and eyes. Her mouth seemed just a trifle large—she was a small woman—but, as that impression eventually disappeared, I may have had it because at first her mouth gaped a little. She was not at all the type one would suspect of being a female bandit. There was a shade of delicacy about her half-hidden face that the mask did not conceal.

I am not inclined to be romantic over any woman, not even a pretty strange one who comes picturesquely and unbidden into my rooms at such indiscreet hours. I had an idea that she knew she was amazingly pretty. Neither her knowledge of it nor her beauty would serve her so well as she might reasonably expect, for I happen not to be very susceptible to the fair, soft charms of women. That is, I have always been very determined not to be. If women are watched closely, suspected constantly and not trusted in the least, one can sometimes keep out of their fingers.

This little intruder had bobbed, wavy hair—light-brown hair that fairly tumbled off her head and clustered about her neck. There was a suggestion of gold about it, merely a flickering glint at times something like sunlight on deep water. I am not being romantic. I am merely describing her hair accurately.

She had on a rather short, black, pleated dress of what appeared to be some kind of serge, and a blouse of the same material. It was a loose blouse with a scroll of black silk braid running about the breasts. The belt was a wide black piece of unpolished leather, caught together by a heavy wide black buckle. She wore shimmering black silk stockings and her small feet, very small feet, were fitted with a sort of heel-less slippers of black soft leather. Her marauding costume seemed to have been designed with an eye toward invisibility. She would have been very inconspicuous in a dim light unless one was attracted by her white hands and the unconcealed part of her face.

I looked at her carefully, deliberately, almost critically. I wanted to know as much about her as my eyes could tell me. Then, too, I have found that it disturbs people in an awkward situation to be

stared at. She did not seem to care. She was a woman—and so touched her hair appraisingly, adjusted with a fleeting gesture her mask, pushed a fold out of her skirt—and quick as a flash turned her little toy-like gun on me, saying sternly—

"Hands up!"

The situation was not nearly so perilous as I may have made it appear in telling. For one thing, I have found that women seldom shoot a man they have never loved. For another thing, I slowly—very slowly—drew back a corner of the blanket and exposed a gun that could have swallowed the one that she held. My gun nestled in my hand, the muzzle straight at her. If she knew anything of me at all, she knew that I could not miss. She may have known that with anything like a fair shot I never did miss.

A half-minute of motionless tenseness followed. Then she gradually straightened up and sat back in her chair, leaving the little gun in her lap as she slowly half-raised her hands.

I leaned over and took the torch and gun from her. I glanced at the gun and tossed it back on to her lap and felt irresistibly a flash of admiration for her. The gun was not loaded. I was not proud of having bluffed out a woman who held a thing worthless as a toy—not even as effective as a toy gun, which will at least make a noise when the cap is fired and perhaps scare somebody.

"And what can I do for you?" I asked.

Breathlessly, eagerly, she answered. Her voice was wonderfully flexible. It had a trained, pleasing tone that sensitively ran the gamut of inflections. Hers was a truly amazing air of spontaneity, both in manner and voice—amazingly so because after the first little bewildered cry she did not seem frightened. I knew that she was. Anybody would have to be, in her situation. She begged me, please, to give her that casket and let her go. The casket belonged to her, she said.

I suggested that we grow confidential and that she begin by telling me about herself. I wondered very much that a woman like this should be the confederate of Blackstone. I knew that he fascinated women, but she did not seem to me to be the sort of woman that he would fascinate. He usually caught empty-headed women, rather vapid, characterless creatures. She was not like that.

"I've made a mistake," she said simply, as if it explained what I wanted to know.

"Undoubtedly," I replied, bowing slightly. "I was not asleep."

"You should have been—this time o' night!" she flashed, with a good pretense of petulant reproachfulness.

She was clever. I began to admire her considerably, though she was desperately trying to play the coquette. She was artful and it took more daring to seem to be a coquette at that moment than it had taken to pick the lock of my room and enter. She crossed her knees and sat back with an air of sulkiness, her eyes on the casket.

"Why," I asked, "all this excitement over bogus gems—glass—paste?"

She looked at me quickly, with a glimmering of alarm in her eyes. And thereby she confirmed certain suspicions that I had. I guessed that among the collection of paste there was a stone or two of real value which could easily enough have been overlooked, I thought, by my friend the pickpocket, who had given the casket little more than a casual glance and almost idly had fingered the trinkets.

"You have examined it carefully—the box?" she demanded.

I assured her with a rather knowing air that there wasn't a thing of value in it.

She gave a decided start at that and a hand went out toward the casket as if to seize and inspect it. But I checked her. I told her that the box had been left in my custody.

"But it is mine!" she exclaimed. "I must have it. I will have it. Oh, please, give it to me!"

That was not the sort of appeal to move me. Women—or men—strike the wrong chord if they think to move me by begging. I forgive audacity; I admire bold strokes; I may even be satisfied if some ingenious bit of daring gets the better of me, provided the circumstances are not too serious; but I have no use for beggars, not even when the

beggars are pretty women. And I have no gallantry.

"Where's Blackstone?" I said abruptly.

It took her a few seconds too long to answer and she replied at first by staring wide-eyed at me and shaking her head slightly. Then, with an air of innocent mystification that was far from deceiving me, asked—

"Who is he?"

"The man who sent you—because he was afraid to come himself," I told her roughly.

Though I did not move, did not turn my head, I was sure that I heard a muffled sound at my door. I guessed that Mr. Blackstone might be listening. I hoped so. He would hear something interesting of himself before I had finished.

"Oh," she said. "Mr. Blackstone?"

"Yes. The gentleman who permits the women he has kissed to pay his expenses."

"Oh!"

Involuntarily her eyes went toward the door. I did not seem to notice. A pause followed. She seemed to be studying me closely, hesitantly trying to decide something. At last, low-voiced, she said:

"I have heard of you—I wonder—" her eyes went furtively toward the door and came back to my face as she went on—"I wonder if—you—are a gentleman."

I told her bluntly that I was not, that I was a gambler, a professional gambler.

When a woman begins to appeal to a man to be a gentleman it is high time to throw up breastworks.

"Blackstone's a gentleman," I added. "He has hidden behind your skirts. I would rather be a crook."

Something very near to a smile came to her lips but went away. She seemed really agitated without showing much nervousness, or, more accurately, I had the impression that she was highly keyed, as if about to venture something desperate.

Rather than that there should be protracted silence, I went into some detail regarding Blackstone. I told some of the things that I knew; that he was a venomous cad and cheat, liar and rascal, without a thing in the way of personal courage to make even Satan's imps respect him.

"You say that behind his back," she remarked, but I could not tell precisely what she meant.

It was not exactly as if suggesting a reproach, nor quite like doubt if what I said was true, but she rather conveyed the idea of wonder as to what I would say to his face or do if confronted by him.

"True," I answered. "His back is all that he presents these days. And that only at a distance, a safe distance."

She said that it was not like what she had heard of me—that I should boast.

But I am suspicious of women when they pay compliments, though she did it exceedingly well. I told her that I did not understand.

She hesitated and again her eyes went a little anxiously toward the door. And I thought that I understood what was the matter. She seemed to be wanting to say something to me, yet was also aware that a listener was at the door. However, it might be that she was outguessing me, playing a deeper game than she thought I would imagine. It is hard to tell about women. Their simplicity and their subtility is often so bewilderingly alike; that is what makes them so hard to understand.

"Please listen," she said. "That casket was stolen from me. I must have it! I will pay—anything. It is money you want, isn't it?"

"Usually, yes. Money. But why this sudden interest in the casket?"

"It hasn't been sudden with me, Mr. Everhard. I was frantic when—when my sister missed the casket. But I didn't know who had taken it."

"I see. You didn't suspect Blackstone."

"I didn't know who had taken it," she repeated, seemingly a little anxious not to offend Mr. Blackstone's eavesdropping ears. "Then I learned that you had it. You have refused every offer. I simply must have it. My—my sister's future is at stake."

"You think a great deal of your sister, don't you? Why didn't you come to me at once?"

She almost whispered—

"I didn't dare!"

"Dare? Dare?" I repeated and significantly gestured my surprize that any one dared not meet me in daylight, yet come at such an hour and in such a manner.

"Oh, I can't explain," she said quickly, feverishly.

I watched her closely. If that was acting it was good acting. But one is always at a disadvantage with women unless they are distrusted and even then one doesn't have much security.

"Would you prefer to explain to me —or to the police?" I asked coolly.

If she had known as much about me as she thought she did, she would have known that I never called on the police. They sometimes called on me; but I shall say this for them: they were always polite. She did not know of my aversion to signaling a policeman: she did not know that I never go to them. She shuddered and sat upright with a jerk.

"Oh, please, no! Can't you be generous? Please. I must have that casket. I must have it! I can't pay an enormous sum, but I'll pay everything I have!"

I scowled and slowly shook my head. It irritates me to be begged.

"Why," I asked coldly, "are you afraid of Blackstone? He is a poisonous, cowardly little snake."

"I know it," she whispered almost inaudibly. "He is my husband!"

I nodded slowly as if I believed her. I did not wholly disbelieve her. No. I simply didn't trust her. She had brains, that woman, and I could not imagine such a woman as she being taken in by a fellow like that.

My hearing is sensitive, exceptionally acute, and I thought that I heard a sound not unlike a restless, impatient slip of hand or foot outside of my door. My ears listened; my eyes watched her.

"Everything is there?" she asked, indicating the casket.

"Yes, everything is on that table," I replied, glancing toward it.

On the table were papers, a bulbous vase from which half a dozen fragrant carnations raised their ragged blossoms, a book or two and the casket, bulking black and solidly against the vase.

I then said that she should tell me why she was so anxious to have that casket and its bogus gems. I said it in such a way as to imply the threat that she would perhaps regret her silence if she refused, but I did not hold out any kind of promise.

"He made me come," she whispered excitedly. "He said you wouldn't shoot a woman. Honestly!"

I knew Blackstone would not hesitate to do a thing of the kind but I could not imagine him making a woman such as she was do anything she did not care to do—particularly turn robber to steal paste.

IT was a peculiar situation, indeed. The husband, or alleged husband, listening at the door wherein his wife had entered as a burglar; I fully aware that he was at the door, yet pressing his wife on threat of arrest to tell me things which might infuriate him. It was not only a peculiar situation but also one that did not displease me. She was afraid of him, or seemed to be, and she did not quite trust me. The distrust was mutual. I simply listened to what she said. I did not believe her and yet scarcely disbelieved her.

She seemed trying to make up her mind to be frank—or to appear frank. It usually amounts to the same thing in a woman. There is one great disadvantage in distrusting women: when they are truthful, one is sure not to believe them, and a woman is never so dangerous as when she is truthful. She made several beginnings, said a word, paused, started again, hesitated, then removed her mask and fingered the elastic with which it had been fastened about her head. My ears were very intent on the door and, without appearing to move so as to be in a better position to glance at it, I edged around a little. I had the strong feeling that something was about to happen.

At last she threw down the mask as if indicative of her decision to throw her story to me, but whether or not she had decided to tell a true story or had simply decided on what lie would suit was rather difficult to decide. If it were a false story, I could not compliment her imagination. It was commonplace enough to be true. She spoke in a low voice and leaned forward confidentially as if not to be overheard. But, I said

to myself, that may be only an artifice. Women like to appear confidential. It is one of their favorite attitudes.

She said that she had met Blackstone when she was young and foolish. She had married him. He left her. She heard that he was dead. She believed it. She went on the stage. She took another name. She thought Blackstone was clear out of her life.

A few months before, she had met a young man, a wealthy young man, who loved her, whom she loved. He had gone to China on business. He was returning and she had come to San Francisco to meet him. His ship was due tomorrow.

She had been in San Francisco about three weeks. She had taken an apartment and was living very quietly, waiting for the man she loved. Then one night Blackstone walked into her rooms. Her husband! He had seen her on the street, recognized her, followed her.

He had gone through everything she had, taken some jewelry, sneered at the casket and its contents, made her give him money; then one day she missed the casket itself. He denied knowing anything about it—and at last she told him it was worth money and that she had to have it. Then he told her he had sold it to me—that I was a fellow he didn't like and he had enjoyed selling me paste.

She had told him that they were not all paste, that it was worth thirty thousand dollars—that she must have it.

She wanted it, she said to me, to return to the man she loved, who had given her the casket and its contents as an engagement present, but of course Blackstone was only agitated by the eager desire to get his hands on so much wealth.

"I can never explain to him—but I must return his gifts!" she cried.

Of course she told me all that much more expressively and even more rapidly than I have related it. She spoke fast, with disconnected phrases that were as enlightening as sentences would have been, and as she talked she leaned nearer and nearer to me and her voice rose until at last, as if careless of who heard her, she cried out that she would return those jewels—she must return them.

I did not believe her. Thirty thousand dollars was too much money. Neither Blackstone nor my pickpocket could have overlooked gems of that extreme value. But I did not have much time to think. She was leaning very close to me and one of her hands was laid on my arm and the fingers pressed tightly as if to hold my attention by physical force; the fingers of her other hand ran up along my arm with a kind of beseeching tenderness.

"Please, please, please!" she begged, but I flung her backward and shot and the man died just as he stood tiptoe facing me through eight inches of open door.

A revolver was in his hand and it exploded from the spasmodic twitch of his fingers as he went down on his face sprawlingly, shot through his forehead. His bullet hit the floor by my chair. It was all over in three ticks of a clock, for he had made the fatal mistake of hissing—

"You and my wife!"

And I killed him.

"You lose," I said frigidly to her, adding that as a trap she and her man had made a pretty flimsy thing of it.

"So help me God, I have told you the truth!" she said tensely, breathless, staring down at the body.

She stood with hand to throat, half-shrinking, as from a thing of horror, yet fascinated.

I told her that she had better not say a word more until she had heard me lie; that then she could tell her story any way that she pleased.

I did not know what kind of a mess I might be in for, with police investigation and a strange woman for witness: but I thought that I had her at a disadvantage. Anyway, I would give her a fighting chance to get out. As for Blackstone: I snatched up the mask she had dropped, rammed a pencil through it to serve for a bullet-hole and quickly placed it on his forehead; then, tossing the little toy gun out of sight, I went to the door, where soon were gathered people in bathrobes and without them, men and women, some of whom chattered in nervous excitement though they tried to hold their teeth set.

I treated the curious mob in a fashion friendly enough. I seemed to do my

best to answer a dozen questions at once, but I told nobody anything. I seemed trying to explain in the midst of interruptions and, though I kept everybody out of the room, I let them jostle me at the door and peer through morbidly, some of them perhaps sympathetically, at the pretty young woman in my room who, huddled forward, was weeping with hands to face.

But, of course, no one could come into the room or touch the body of the dead man until the police arrived. Every one was tense with nervous curiosity; though the man lay on his face, all could see that he was masked. It seemed mysterious and thrilling.

The police came, the police-patrol. It came rattling down the street through one of San Francisco's heavy fogs and the policemen bustled with an air of directness and business through the crowd about my door.

They knew me at a glance and, though their eyes were a little suspicious, they were respectful. My record was not above suspicion, but it was unindictable.

I told my story. I had not been able to sleep. I had sat up, trying to read. I had heard a noise in the hall, then a sort of scuffling, not loud, but strange enough to arouse curiosity. I had gone to the door and listened, barely opening it. Almost at once a woman had flung herself against it. She could hardly talk. She was out of breath and frightened. She staggered into the room, gasping for me to save her.

I had been surprized and did not know quite what to do and had just turned around when a shot was fired—and, having a gun on the arm of my chair, I had snatched it up and shot. I mentioned to the policemen, just to remind them, that at times I could shoot rapidly. I had whirled and shot. I did not know the woman. I had never seen her before. The man was masked.

THAT was my story. Not truthful perhaps, but honest. The woman could get from the net as well as she could. I had no great sympathy for her, for I was more than half inclined to believe that she had leaned so close to me, had gripped my arm so hard and let her fingers run up my arm so pleadingly, to distract my attention from the door and give Blackstone a chance to come in and cover me with his gun—and perhaps shoot. She may have been sincere and he may have merely jumped at the chance of seeking an excuse to kill me by pretending to find his wife and me together.

Neither the truth as she might tell it nor what lies she could imagine would very well discredit my story. I had told it first. I had told it plausibly. Besides, the dead man wore a mask and the police are never inclined to side with masked men, living or dead. She might say I had poked a pencil through the black silk, but then she would have to explain how the mask came to be in the room, and so implicate herself; whereas I had given her a loop-hole if she had the ingenuity to take it.

When the police came into the room, other people tried to follow. They tried to crowd close to hear what the woman would say, but every one was pushed back into the hall and a big policeman put his arm, like a bar, across the door.

When I had finished with my story, the woman flashed a look at me that I did not understand: just a flash from the corner of her eye when I approached and cut off other people's view from her face. The look appeared more full of astonishment than anything else, but there also seemed to be a little something of gratitude.

She sobbed convincingly and in a broken voice and with nodding head said that I had told just what had happened. The police had looked into the dead man's face but none of them recognized him. She told his name. She said that he had hounded her; that she could not escape him and that she was afraid of him. He had threatened to kill her because she would not be his wife.

She sobbed a great deal at this point, in order, I think, to get time to decide how best to go on. One big policeman laid a hand gently on her shoulder and spoke encouragingly.

She went on. She lived at the apartment next door. He must have learned in some way that she was planning to move so as to hide from him. Shortly before midnight he had telephoned that he would kill her if she tried to run away from him. Later he telephoned

again that he was coming out and that he was going to wear a mask so that he could kill her without any one recognizing him.

He must have been drunk, she said. He was often drunk. She snatched a handful of things together and fled, but he had met her right at the entrance. She broke away from him and ran. He followed. She darted through the entrance next door and ran up the stairs. He had caught her by the skirt and put the gun to her head but she had tripped him and fled down the hall—and burst into my room. After that everything had happened as I said.

As a preliminary story, the police were ready to accept it. Things more strange than she told happened daily under their noses and nothing remained except to confirm her story by going to the apartment next door. I wondered if she had thought of that when she gave an address so near at hand.

She had said that her name was Marjorie Cline and before she left the room I had no reason to question her ingenuity and resourcefulness. She stood up to go with the officers. Without a flaw she kept the rôle I had thrust upon her.

She looked pathetic and appealing. She was pretty and she did appear helpless, thoroughly distressed; so much so that the policemen, who are rather cynical and not easily made sympathetic toward people who tell strange stories, were gentle, even kind, with her. She spoke to me weakly, without offering a handclasp or thanks, which would not have looked well, and said that she was sorry that she had brought such trouble upon me. I bowed remotely and did not return any polite phrases.

Then she did a daring thing. She picked up the black casket from the table, picked it up swiftly and handed it with a sort of explanatory gesture toward the biggest policeman, saying that it contained a few little trinkets with which she had fled her room. The policeman looked at me, but before I could say anything —I don't know that I would have said much anyway—she explained further:

"Oh, yes, it's mine. See the monogram: 'M. C.'"

He took it into his hand, scrutinized it and handed it back to her; together they went out, leaving me staring through the doorway.

The policeman who kept watch over the dead sat down, lighted a cigar, flicked ashes on the carpet and began to talk of other dead men and the various ways in which they had found their deaths. I bent over and put my nose to the carnations. I had of late been showing a rather unusual interest in flowers.

Suddenly a heavy, uniformed man burst into the room.

"She's got away!" he cried. "The little devil—slipped right around the corner. Wasn't watching her. Never suspected a thing. They never heard of her at the apartment next door—and she's gone. Right into the fog!"

The big fellow smashed his fist into an open palm and swore feelingly. Then questions came rapidly at me, but I stood pat. I knew nothing more of her than I had told. Nothing was to be got out of me—not at that late hour.

Then the ambulance came and the policeman and the dead man went away. When they were gone I made sure that the blinds were down, hung a cap on the door-knob and emptied the large bulbous vase into the water-bowl. Then I fished out rings, bracelets, earrings and such, and dried them on a bath-towel and tumbled the collection on the bed. I went over them carefully, but as I knew nothing of gems anyway it was not surprizing that I found none I could pronounce genuine.

The next day I received a note. It was a short note, but it came from the woman whose name I never knew, for she said that it was not Marjorie Cline—"but something like that." She assured me that her story, as she had told it to me, was true, literally true, and that I was welcome to the paste gems as mementoes from her, because the casket had a false bottom where the real jewels were hidden. The lock was flimsy, so a robber might break it open easily and then, finding the paste duplicates, fill his pockets and go with nothing of value. The note ended:

> Oh, I hope it isn't a terrible thing to say, but I believe my prayers to be freed from that beastly man were heard in heaven—for my ship came in today, and I can be happy now.
> M. C.

PROBABLY there is little need to explain that your delay in getting this issue of *Adventure* and the one before it is due to the printers' strike in New York. Camp-Fire is not the place to discuss the merits of the strike, but I'd like to make clear the fact that if it were not for a conflict between the local Unions and the general organization there would be no delay in getting your magazines to you, this being a Union shop in good standing with the general organization. Perhaps the strike will be over by the time you read this, but in any case you will probably be getting your issues of *Adventure* faster than usual until we catch up with the regular schedule. Don't wait for the usual two-week interval; keep your eye on the stands for the appearance of new issues.

Romance, too, will go through the same kind of hurry-up process.

I'll not bother you with the details, but in order to speed up these delayed issues it was found advisable to substitute the Mid-January and First February issues for the Mid-December and First January issues, with, of course, the exception of the serials and some minor changes. Also another change—since the stories by H. A. Lamb and Robert J. Pearsall are consecutive, they have to be dropped from several issues but will appear as soon as conditions make it possible.

Likewise it was impossible for us to publish in this number the stories promised in the last "Trail Ahead." They will appear in a later issue.

Our "Camp-Fire," too, has had to be changed in minor ways, as have "Ask Adventure" and "Looking Ahead," but, unless I make a slip somewhere in the general confusion, I think these changes will in no way affect your comfort in reading the magazine.

HERE is an extremely interesting suggestion put forward by Edgar Young. He knows the adventurer's needs at first-hand but the value of these books seems plain enough even to the stay-at-home. How do you feel about it?

Brooklyn, New York.

I am passing along an idea that occurred to me. Perhaps there might be some manufacturing stationery comrade of your acquaintance who might like to take it up, or the man who finally makes the large registers for the stations might like it. It's free to any one who likes it, so far as I'm concerned.

IT is a fact that all of us have carried books of some sort and got signatures in them, but nothing especially for this purpose has ever been designed, so far as I know. Every man who drops in here begins to drag out railroad clearances, letters, etc., to establish proof of something or other. A book of the sort along the general lines I have hastily sketched should be very acceptable to all travelers. A great many of us are modest about telling some outlandish thing we have seen in some outlandish place without having proper papers to back it up, and a thing that cuts is to be accused of lying when telling the exact and unvarnished truth.

Books of this kind could be filled and others obtained and used in numerical order. A man could have a just pride in such a record and hand the book down to his children. The numerous foreign and native seal impressions and signatures with autographs of prominent men would also make it interesting.

I AM one of those who claim that adventure has better precedents and records than it has ever been given credit for. All advancement on the face of the earth has been due to it. We Americans can be especially proud of our adventurous forefathers. There are those who, alas, wish to detract from the spirit of adventure. "Rolling stones gather no moss," they claim. This in spite of the fact that the famous hobo A1 owns a large brick building in Pittsburg or somewhere over there, the usual detractor from the name of the roving tribe not having a hundred dollars' bank balance. The rolling stones do gather the moss, lots of it, intellectual and material, when they

get ready to. Tom Edison, tramp telegrapher, lights the world, splits one wire into four parts for the telegraph companies, braces them up with phonograph music, and other stunts. Where do they get that stuff?

It's partly up to us to respectabilize adventure and, besides the many of us who are doing it in a didactic and thematic way, this has occurred to me as another method.

A SIZE to fit easily in the coat pocket or roughly about the size of the page I am attaching (4½ × 6 in.) seems to be about right. The printing would jam up closer than the type of this machine I am using. This would leave more room for the seal space and for the remarks spaces at bottom. Two, if not three, such blanks could fill a page.

Without taking much time to inflate on the idea, these books would prove useful:

1. To establish an alibi when arrested on suspicion. (I was arrested in Matoon, Ill., once for a burglary in Paris, Ill., and if the conductor of the freight I came in on had not voluntarily come forward with his story I would possibly have been locked up.)
2. Proof of residence in some place.
3. Record for quick trips by foot, mule, or auto across country.
4. Autographs of famous men.
5. Records of exploration.
6. To produce to newspaper men when asking for publicity in small towns.
7. To prove a man is what he claims to be.
8. As an ad for the magazine when shown and spoken of, etc., etc., etc.
9. To establish records of residence for bond companies when not employed.—EDGAR YOUNG.

One page of Mr. Young's plan for the book contains the following:

One who carries a book of this kind should experience no trouble in obtaining signatures from American or other consuls, postmasters, railroad and steamship agents, mayors or other prominent persons of the city, town, village, hamlet, in which they happen to be, in order to establish beyond doubt a record of travel or exploration. Beyond the outposts of civilization, among Indians and others who are unable to write, the identifying person should be requested to make a thumb-print in the space left for "seal of office" and a tiny pad should be carried for this purpose in a sealed cartridge-shell or other small air-tight container.

Another page contains blanks for the bearer's name, home address, nationality, male or female, weight, height, hair, eyes, complexion, physical marks—a description identification. Also directions as to whom to notify in case of injury or death. Also certified signature, thumb-print and photograph.

Other pages contain (two each) forms for official seals and signatures:

This is to certify that the person whose photograph and signature appear in the front of this book has requested me to witness the fact that he has been here on the above date and I assume no obligation whatever beyond the fact that I have seen him or her in person.

What do you think of this idea? Let's have your opinions and suggestions. In case the plan is put into operation a first step would be to get registered the names of those who would want these books.

AS to the exactness of his story of the killing of Billy the Kid, in an earlier issue, E. A. Brininstool is ready to go to the mat:

Los Angeles, California.

Pat Garrett was killed himself in a manner somewhat after that in which he killed the Kid. This is history. Ask anybody who knows New Mexican and Arizona history. Ask John Poe, banker of Roswell, N. M., who was one of the three men in the party who captured the Kid—and killed him.

As a matter of fact, I will wager Brother Wood $1000 in cash, and put up the money, if my story of the killing of Billy the Kid is not exactly as described by me. And we will leave it to John Poe himself. Poe yet lives and is president of the Citizens Bank of Roswell.—E. A. BRININSTOOL.

IT doesn't seem likely to me that any man who hands out his honest opinions man-fashion at Camp-Fire will get anything but respect, whether all of us agree with his opinions or not. Nor will Mr. Cain, who introduces himself according to our custom on the appearance of his first story in our magazine, fail to find a good many of us who see things as he does, at least in a general way.

South Orange, New Jersey.

YOU ask me to make a bow to the Camp-Fire. I bow. That is easy. But, to tell anything about myself that would interest your readers is something else again. I've been a fat family man so long that it seems to me the only real adventure is getting the rent and keeping the door-step half-way free of bill-collectors. Compared to that, the excitements I have got out of such uneventful voyages as I once made, or by batting about a little in small motor or sail boats—seem mild indeed. Honestly, this mere matter of life and death seems pretty tame to me. Dying doesn't look to me like half the sacrifice or pain of living

through some things. And what sort of man is it who would not give his life a dozen times rather than see some others suffer or yield a real principle? I've written a lot of adventure stories. When I get a situation up where the hero and the heroine are sailing through the air about half-way down the thousand-foot precipice, I have to sit back and laugh. What does it matter whether they land on a hay-mound and survive, or hit a rock and go out?

EDITORS have a way of shifting titles on me. I'm calling the story, "A Prejudice Against Suicide," because that was the real idea I had in writing that story. Circumstances broke to keep me from being a clergyman after I had got most of the training for it. My idea is that of obedience to the law, even when it seems to have lost its purpose in an individual case. Here is a man without a chance to live, refusing to save himself the last hours of agony by a crime which, perhaps, few would condemn under the circumstances. The sea setting of the story was a mere detail for conveying the feeling I have that law and right are fixed by a power so much above us that they may not be subverted to special conditions of individuals. Not all the ideas I put into stories come, as this one did, out of the tomes of moral theology; but when I write a story with no idea bigger than living through a peril or series of them, you can figure that I laughed when I wrote it. A man will always be to me so much bigger than his mere physical life that I shall find it funny to take that side of him very seriously. Still—I love funny things. So don't strain your mind too hard trying to find the moral of a yarn with my name at the top of it. There may not be any.

But I am still theologian enough to believe that the real big adventure is that of each one of us in keeping our souls out of hell for the long time after we're dead, and getting and holding the love for the Right and the God that makes Right.

Think I ought to have kept away from the Camp-Fire and stayed in church? Yours for the real adventures.—GEORGE M. A. CAIN.

MANY of you responded to my request for frank and detailed opinions on our new sister magazine *Romance* and I want to thank you sincerely. That kind of opinion helps a lot. Creating a new magazine is not so easy as it sounds and it is perhaps still more difficult for the editor to tell just what it's like after it is created. It's like a writer trying to criticize his own story. In either case a fellow has to turn to outside opinion to find out what's really there.

Your opinions helped in many ways. Of course there were the inevitable differences of taste and judgment. One letter would say "Give us more stories like 'x';" the next would say "All the stories are good except 'x,' which is rotten." But, taking all the letters as a whole, the net result was very valuable guidance for the future.

NATURALLY your letters, being from *Adventure* readers and nearly all men (we find only 15 per cent. of *Adventure's* newsstand sales are to women and girls), they give the point of view of only those who are strong for a man's magazine, and I'm glad to say their verdict is overwhelmingly favorable. But *Romance*, aimed at women as well as men, must appeal to both. I have no such quick ways of getting a verdict from women readers, but, though there has been criticism (not from any of you) that *Romance* is too much like *Adventure*, newsstand reports prove that the other sex must be taking kindly to it. Indeed, the sales indicate that we should have printed a much larger edition to meet the demand.

AND *Romance* has by no means struck its real gait yet. It takes time to shape a new magazine into its final form. Remember how long it's taken to shape our own magazine, and of course there are always some changes and improvements to be made. If *Romance* is good now, it's going to be a whole lot better at the end of a year.

FROM one of our Indian comrades a word about mound-builders and snake-bites:

Eufaula, Oklahoma.

I note a lot about the Indian in your magazine. I am an Indian myself, and have written a great many articles for newspapers; and at one time wrote magazine articles. I don't know if this recommendation would cut any ice with *Adventure* or not, but I believe I could open the eyes of some of the historians of this country on some subjects such as the history of the mound-builders of North America as handed down to me from mouth to ear. I can give a mouth to ear history of the origin of the Red Moon and can relate some stubborn facts about the Medicine Men of the Red Race.

I notice in the *Adventure* several times about the cure for snake-bites. It is no trouble to cure a rattler's bite if one knows what to use,

which is very simple. I have a dead-shot cure, an Indian remedy.

If this does not go to the waste basket I may open the eyes of the bunch at the Camp-Fire, by relating some of my ups and downs. I like *Adventure* because its articles have lots of ups and downs in the wilds of American and also foreign lands. As the Red Man always ends his speech, "That is all."—CHARLES GIBSON.

SOME time ago we offered a five years' subscription for the best sub-title or characterizing line for our magazine. There were some hundreds of suggestions after dropping out duplications, and selection was made by a large and rather informal committee. The highest vote went to "Calls Us All" by V. C. Doaslaugh of Oakland, California. "In the World's Four Corners," from Williams F. Hooker of New York, and "The World Between Two Covers," from Daniel Flannery of Hampton, Virginia, ranked next.

I was particularly pleased that many of the suggested lines centered on our magazine's cleanness. Many, of course, featured its appeal to real men; many its educative value. Taken as a whole, the list not only contained many good lines but helped by giving us a clearer understanding of our readers' feelings toward the magazine.

Here in the office we've been trying for years to hit on a characterizing line that would hit the bull's-eye in the exact center. Though my personal opinion doesn't exactly coincide with the general vote, I think "Calls Us All" is better than anything we in the office have ever produced. Whether it can be improved upon and to what extent it shall be used are other questions.

Anyhow, the little contest gave valuable results; every one who contributed has our sincere thanks and we're very glad to put Mr. Doaslaugh down for a five years' subscription.

THE crucifixion of Estevanico, the negro who shared with Cabeza de Vaca ten years of exploration, as set forth in his story in this issue, Captain Rodney states is historical, and his fight with the black stranger of the South is still told in the traditions of the Moqui Indians.

Of the valley *Mercedes* passed through, after having been thrown into the hands of the Indians by the tornado, Captain Rodney says:

> This was the valley of the Santa Cruz River that flows from Mexico, north into Arizona. Coronado left Culiacan in Sonora, passed north through the site of the present city of Nogales; thence to where Tombstone stands. From there he headed about northeast through the White Mountains and Nutriosa to the first of his fabled cities, Hawikuk. At this point he had a battle, drove the Indians away and headed east for the second city, Acoma, where Estevanico had been killed the previous year in a fight, the traditions of which still are told by the Moquis.

WE'RE going to try a new stunt in our magazine. If you don't like it we'll not go on with it, but I've very little doubt about your liking it.

It's this way. Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off the Trail" story. There will be a * after its title on the contents page and again at the head of the story itself. That star will be a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazine, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

Remember that when a story is so marked it does not mean that this story is either better or worse than the other stories in the same issue. Merely sort of different. All of you won't always agree with us, of course, as to which stories should be called "Off the Trail." Sometimes we'll have a hard time deciding ourselves. But, as a class, you can safely count on such stories being different from our usual stories and often different from the run of stories in any magazine.

We don't know how many of them there will be. Probably about one every other issue, possibly fewer, improbably more.

There will be one in the next issue.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

THE president of one of our greatest universities not long ago gave publicity to the fact that a college president gets eighteen cents an hour while a motorman gets sixty cents an hour. There is enough to think about in that fact to keep us pondering for some time.

Any given man who is not mental or physical deficient can learn to be an efficient motorman in a few weeks. The same man in most cases could not learn to be an efficient college president in thirty or forty years. Even if he had the natural ability for the job it would mean at least sixteen years spent in common school, high school and college education plus, say, twenty years more of living and development and probable further study. Call it thirty-five years of training to fit him to be a college president at the age of forty-two.

Count eight years of school for the motorman. That means that, to be a college president, the same man must spend at least eight more years in school, going to the age of twenty-two before he can even begin being an earner, beyond earning enough to carry him through school and college. The extra eight years represent a financial loss or investment.

THEN must follow twenty years of living, working and experience before he is ready for his real job. All these twenty-eight years he could have been getting sixty cents an hour as a motorman. He will probably get less in the other line at first, probably more after a few years—*if* he proves a success. He must always risk failure in his endeavor—the loss of his extra investment in time and money, while if he'd been a motorman instead his chance of failure after once qualifying would be comparatively negligible. If he became a college professor on graduation he would receive far less from start to finish than he'd have got as a motorman. Professors get far less than even college presidents.

And when at last, if he does succeed in becoming one of the few hundreds out of one hundred million or one hundred and twenty million who are college presidents, he gets eighteen cents an hour instead of the sixty cents he'd have got as a motorman.

And, of course, as a college president his expenses would be far heavier than as a motorman.

Why be a college president?

Why would anybody be a college president? Unless he were born rich. And it happens that most of the men whose fitness caused them to be chosen as college presidents were *not* born rich and are dependent upon their wages.

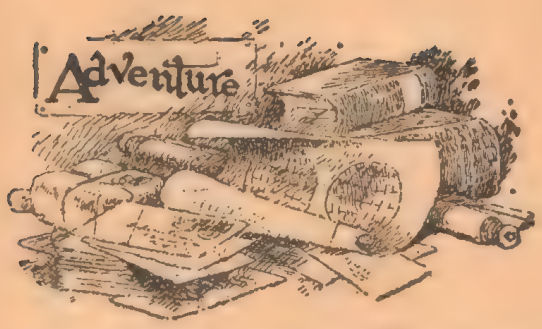
UNDER such conditions, who is going to train himself for a college president? Any one with sufficient intelligence for the job is too intelligent to limit his possible earnings to several times less than he can get as a motorman or in hundreds of other kinds of skilled, half-skilled or unskilled manual labor. The honor and congeniality of the position may mean much to you, but these things won't feed your children.

And how about college professors, who get far less than college presidents? Under such conditions there won't be any colleges after awhile, or else they will be run by failures who haven't brains enough to be a successful motorman or mechanic or much of anything else.

THE country is full of people who sneer at college professors and at the colleges themselves. Nearly always they have never been in college and therefore are sneering at something of which they have no first-hand knowledge. I'm a college man and sneer at colleges, myself, as do many other college men, but we sneer only at what we believe are the mistakes in present college methods. Having had first-hand experience, we are not such fools as to sneer at colleges as an institution. Like other human institutions they are faulty, but they are essential to civilization and progress.

LOOK at it this way. The manual laborer is a necessity to civilization and deserves fuller recognition than he has even yet received. Without the hand-man civilization would fall to pieces. If we didn't have motormen our motor cars couldn't run. But mark this: If we didn't have the brain-man there wouldn't *be* any motor cars. The motorman would have no job.

Just how many cents per hour a motorman should receive is a matter to be determined by general economic conditions. If the motorman's work deserves sixty cents an hour or $1.20 an hour, he ought to have it. *But*, in the judgment of any sane man, the brain-worker deserves at least as much as the hand-worker. This last point requires individual consideration. More about it later on.—A. S. H.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: Jan. to Sept., 1916 (inclusive); Dec., 1916, to Apr., 1917 (inclusive); June, 1917, to Mid-Dec., 1917 (inclusive); First Jan., 1918, to Mid-Aug., 1918 (inclusive); First Dec. and Mid-Dec., 1918. Twenty cents per copy, express collect.—Address DACRE DUNN, Center, Col.

WILL SELL: All issues from March, 1915, to date. Two-thirds price at date of publication; postage prepaid.—Address FRED AMER, 703 East Long St., Columbus, Ohio.

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced; with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, postpaid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs; topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

11. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
R. S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Minnesota and Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing, trapping; canoes and snow shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 3
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 4
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 8
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Pevver Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N.W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

32. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Building, Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Building, Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

FOR ARMY, NAVY OR MARINE CORPS

Accurate, free information. What the Government is doing for discharged soldiers and sailors. Facts, not opinions, given. No questions answered involving criticism or bestowing praise or blame. Enclose stamped addressed envelope. Address—SERVICE, THE HOME SECTOR, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, New York.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

Wilds of the Upper Amazon

ABOUT the least known of any land on earth is that vast trackless territory claimed by Brazil, Peru and Ecuador lying under the shadow of the Andes.

Question:—"My friend and I have just returned from overseas and wish to see a little more of the world before we settle down to our old business. We are interested in South America, and particularly in that part where Brazil joins Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. We thought there ought to be opportunity to have plenty of adventures while we were exploring, hunting, and perhaps bartering with the natives.

We don't care whether we get killed in the attempt. What we want is a chance to see the real wilderness, territory that has not been entered by a white man.

Several years ago, I read about a large unexplored territory in the western part of Brazil. It was said to be several hundred miles in length and width and never to have been entered by an explorer. I believe its location was somewhere near the frontier of Bolivia, Peru or Ecuador.

Where is this country located? Or do you know of a part of South America that is still wilder and less known?

How can one best get there?

Which is the best time of the year to leave the United States?

What is the fare to the nearest seaport in South America?

What is the fare from there to the last outpost of civilization?

Which means of transportation should one use on the way from there into the unknown?

What special equipment is necessary? Should it be brought from the States or bought at the starting-point?

How about scientific instruments?

How about medicine?

I have my hunting and camping outfit that I used here in Arizona. I thought to take along my .303 Savage rifle and Smith and Wesson .38 Special. I guess you will think the latter gun is rather lacking in power; but I found it accurate and it has the advantage that cartridges are very light. How much ammunition would you suggest for these two guns?

We thought we would live on the country and hunt, fish, and perhaps barter some food from the natives; so we would not need to carry much supplies with us. What would you suggest?

What articles would you recommend for barter with the savages? How much? We want to go light and so do not wish to take along more of these goods than necessary.

What animals can we count on for food?

Are the hides of jaguars, etc., worth taking to the market if you have to go so far?

Are there any maps of the country surrounding the "unknown"?

Can you tell me anything about the customs duties on the equipment I would bring from the States?

Is there an export duty on gold obtained from the natives?

I almost forgot to ask you what clothing and footwear you would recommend and how much in reserve."—J. H. S., McNeal, Arizona.

Answer, by Mr. Goldsmith:—The country you mention is probably the wildest and least explored in South America.

There are two ways of entering. You could go by the Atlantic and the river Amazon, starting in Brazil from Pará and ascending the Amazon in gradually diminishing steamers to Iquitos in Perú. In order to reach Pará, you would have to take a small steamer in New York, or you could take one of the large steamers to Bahia, and return to Pará on a small steamer. The fare from New York to Bahia, first-class, is $330; second-class, $145. If you went directly to Pará, it would probably be $15 or $20 less, and if you went to Bahia and returned to Pará, it would probably be $15 to $20 more for the first-class fare. The trip from New York to Bahia is from fifteen to nineteen days, and Pará to Iquitos from twelve to twenty days. The expense of the trip from Pará to Iquitos would depend somewhat upon the kind of boats used, and the cost would be from $25 to $50.

I do not recommend this trip for the ascent, however, but rather for the descent after you have finished your explorations and wish to return to the United States, if you do return.

What I think would be better and much more interesting would be to sail from San Francisco to Callao, Perú, the cost being about $200, or, if you are in a hurry, to come to New York and sail from New York on one of the W. R. Grace & Company boats directly to Callao through the Panama Canal. From Callao you take the train or the street car to Lima, the capital, seven miles. There you get your supplies. Then you take the train from Lima to La Oroya, the eastern terminus of the railway. Then you go on horseback—using mules—to Canchamayo, Perú, which is on the edge of the wilds. From that point there are several directions you might take.

Probably the best route would be along the Palcazu River, using canoes, and taking natives for guides, assistants and porters. To the right and left of the river you would have hundreds of miles to explore. There is plenty of traffic of one kind or another on the river, but you could lose yourselves immediately when you went back into the wilds.

To reach Brazil you would continue this route along the Palcazu River to the Pachitea, which is formed by the Palcazu and the Pichis. Following the Pachitea, you come to the point where it joins the great river Ucayali, and this brings you to the last town in Perú before you enter Brazilian territory.

From Lima to Iquitos would be from twenty-five to thirty days. The fare on the railway is about thirty *soles*—$15—and you would have to pay the Indians very little, one or two cheap guns, about which I shall speak later.

From Iquitos to the mouth of the Amazon

at Pará, you could go down in small steamers and the trip could be made in this direction in ten days.

Back of all these rivers lies the unexplored country. In this region you would find the Pampas del Sacramento, in Perú, in which France could be set down without filling it, and which is wild enough for the most ambitious explorer.

If you are not satisfied with what you found in this part of Perú, you could strike into the interior from Paita, in the *departamento*—province or district—of Piura. Passing out of this *departamento*, you would reach the river Marañón, which bathes the regions in litigation between Ecuador and Perú. By descending the Marañón to its union with Ucayali, which forms the great river of the Amazon, you would find yourself in primitive country.

Your attention should be called to the fact that on the right bank of the Pachitea are to be found Indians called Cashibus, who are anthropophagi, or cannibals, who are very fierce barbarians and who are hated and pursued by all the surrounding tribes. These Cashibus are said to be very splendid specimens of humanity.

The best time to go to that country is from April to July, which is called the dry season, although it is not dry, but simply rains every afternoon and not all the time. In order to reach that country by the first of April you ought to leave the United States about the middle of February.

I have indicated in a general way what the means of transportation are. While you are in Lima, you ought to make yourself known to the authorities, telling them that your object is to explore the country in the interest of science and asking for the cooperation of the government. If you secure this, it would aid you in obtaining Indians and the cooperation of the authorities in the country districts and in the wilds.

Your special equipment should consist of as few clothes as possible, and they should be of light weight, as the weather is always extremely hot. For shoes you could find nothing better than *alpargates*, which you could buy in Lima. You should always carry a hammock, and you can secure hammocks so light that they could be bound around your waist and used as a belt in traveling. Your firearms for protection should consist of a good rifle—your Savage would be all right—and a good pistol. Your .38 Smith and Wesson seems to me rather small. I like a Colt .45 double-action. Nevertheless, your Smith and Wesson .38 will probably be all right, as you would depend upon your rifle mostly. You ought also to get a good *machete* in Lima. This is a handy weapon for defense and for chopping.

Carry all the ammunition you can. You should take along all the canned and dry provisions you can pack. Sugar and alcohol you can easily secure in Lima. You will need plenty of quinine, purgatives, iodine (for insect bites), laudanum (as you will often have stomach-ache due to change of water), and ammonia. A few bottles of Perry Davis's "pain-killer" would come in handy, as it and the ammonia are good for scorpion bites.

You will not be able to use money among the Indians to any great extent. You will therefore need to take articles for trading: cheap shotguns, muzzle-loading, with powder, shot and balls, and percussion caps. The natives have no use for cartridges. You ought to have a big supply of knives, shears, scissors, needles, thread, white cloth, beads, and in general any small useful articles. Cheap pocket-knives are very good. Cheap pistols, old-fashioned and muzzle-loading, would be good for trading.

In Iquitos or in Canchamayo you can get good guides and porters from the local authorities. You should be very careful to have reliable Indians.

All the rivers have plenty of fish so that you could always fall back on this kind of food. You can take along hooks and tackle, but you could probably supply yourself with those of a primitive character in Iquitos. There is game, if you know how to get at it; deer, wild boar, armadillos, anta (moose or elk), and a vast variety of birds. You ought always to have a supply of canned or dried food as an emergency. Various kinds of chocolate can be secured in the country, and this, as you know, is good food.

The hide of the *jaguares*, etc., are worth preserving and are salable.

You can secure maps in Lima, and if you wish to supply yourself with local maps in advance, write to the Sociedad Geográfica, Lima, Perú, and to the Ministerio de Formento, Lima, Perú, using a five-cent stamp on your letters, and explaining that you wish maps of the country indicated, and telling of your desire to make scientific investigations. Maps made by Raymondi are very good.

Upon your arrival at Lima, you can secure much information about that country by visiting the Convento de los Padres Franciscanos (Padres Descalzos).

There is a slight export tax on gold.

When you reach Callao, if you explain to the custom-house authorities the nature of your expedition, and that you do not intend to sell, but rather to barter in order to cover your expenses with the Indians, you probably will have to pay little or no duty.

Would You Hunt in Africa?

EVERY adventurer should serve an apprenticeship in his own country before trying those far places where only the experienced, the hardened, the determined can expect to succeed. West Africa is about the toughest spot on earth for the uninitiated. If you ever hope to follow the dark trails of Nigeria weigh carefully what Mr. Miller says:

Question:—"What are the chances for big-game hunting in Africa? What equipment would be necessary for a six-months' trip, and what would be the cost?

Can you tell me the wages a white boy of seventeen might expect to receive in West Africa? Also, please explain Africa fully to ame, and give me an idea of the proper arms efor hunting there."—ELSWORTH HITE, Petersburg, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—You sure have handed me a bunch of questions, Mr. Hite. It is plain that you have very little idea of Africa. Big game hunting is out of the question. It takes money (license to shoot two elephants costs $150) and it takes experience. There are no berths open in Nigeria to young men. Whites do not reside in West Africa, owing to the unhealthy climate, but go out on time contracts for the large operating companies. About arms: You have to deposit with the collector of customs two hundred dollars before he will issue a permit to take in arms, this being a precaution against trading firearms to natives.

For all game, except extremely heavy game—elephant, rhino, buffalo—I'd recommend our Springfield army rifle, restocked for practical sporting purposes. Say, then, a modern Springfield, one double-express and a .405 American repeater. That would cover every contingency. Revolvers are practically useless.

You ask me to explain Africa in full. Are you aware that there are something like two thousand books on Africa; that it is twice as large as the United States; that it has civilized countries and barbarous countries? I can not in a letter detail the trails of a continent, nor yet of Nigeria, as that would take a book.

If you want to go adventuring, first serve an apprenticeship with gun and trail right here in America. Rough it in the mountains, learn to make your camp-fire, rustle grub, harden to heat and cold, hunger and fatigue, then allow your fancies to drift over far horizons. And don't be discouraged if you don't tumble into the experiences you seek right away. Stick it up before your mind that you want to shoot lions and some day you will shoot lions, if you want to hard enough. Anyway that is my experience. I generally got what I wanted by staying with it and waiting patiently. Above all, read—read anything and everything along the line of the thing you desire.

TRAILS LOST

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ROWE, GLEN S. Last heard of in South America. Write.—Address TED DICKSON, JR., care of *Adventure*.

WOON, BASIL D. Have not heard from you since your transfer to the Aviation Corps. Please write.—Address TED DICKSON, JR., care of *Adventure*.

ROHRBECK, FRANK W. Write to your old pal, Elmer. Want to make trip up North.—Address ELMER ANDERSON, 1403 Kinnikinnick Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.

TYLER, MRS. Her son was adopted by a family in Louisville, Ky., and this son would like to hear from her. She was last heard of in Virginia. Has also worked in Ohio. Any one knowing her whereabouts kindly write.—Address U. S. N., care of *Adventure*.

WILLIAMS, JAMES. Mayor of Boston about thirty years ago. Would like to communicate with him, as he is related to me. Any information will be appreciated.—Address EDMUND SUMMERHILL, The Arcade, Milson's Point, Sidney, New South Wales.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

WARD, ARTHUR C. Born in Massachusetts. For eight years a resident of the Republic of Panama. Last heard of in December, 1918, when serving as A. B. on S.S. *Cristobal*. Write your old pal, and let's talk old days over again.—Address AAGE R. OLSEN, Box 61, Norwegian Seamen's Church, 111 Pioneer St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

ROUNSLEY, CHARLEY F. Age thirty, fair complexion, light hair, blue eyes, height six feet, weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Scar over right eye, and one on left wrist. Last heard of at Sipsey, Fla., in 1912 or 1913. Is interested in baseball, a pitcher himself Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. C. ROUNSLEY, R. 2, Box 180, Bessemer, Ala.

MEADOWS, JULIAN H. Please write your sister, as she is very anxious to know where you are.—Address MRS. DAWN STOKES JONES, 72 Fowler St., Atlanta, Ga.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

POLLOCK, GRANVILLE A. Formerly with Lafayette Escadrille. Send your present address, as you evidently did not get my reply to your other letter.—Address L. J. S., care of *Adventure*.

HOLMES, NORMAN L. Last heard of with the Sixth Aero Squadron at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Home is in Philadelphia. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. F. ALEXANDER, care of Methodist Hospital, Omaha, Nebr.

DOYLE (First Name.) Worked in Alberta, B. C. Has artificial limb and is known as "Peg" and "Chicago Peg," also known in Chicago as the "Worm." Last heard of in Seattle, Wash.—Address "OVERLAND RED," care of *Adventure*.

PRATT, GEORGE B. Last heard of in Los Angeles, Calif. Was in the employ of Wells Fargo Co. in 1887. Any information would be appreciated by his brother.—Address JOHN L. PRATT, 4611 St. Catherines St., So. Vancouver, B. C.

MURPHY, FLOYD. About eighteen years of age. Lived at Winthrop and later at Westboro, Mass. Now probably an attendant in a hospital. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address FREDERIC R. BROWN, 27 Hollis St., Newton, Mass.

COLLINS, MICHAEL JAMES. Brother. Age fifty-nine, height five feet five inches, blue eyes, gray hair. Laborer. Last seen in Cincinnati, Ohio, in August, 1915. Said he was going to Minnesota. Distribution of his mother's estate waiting him.—Address MRS. J. H. ROCKWOOD, 4826 Section Ave., Norwood, Ohio.

O'HARA, EARL WILLIAM. Husband. Last heard of in Winnipeg, Canada. Your wife, Marie, is ill and needs your assistance. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. EARL W. O'HARA, 14 West Stockton Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa., care of Mrs. J. E. Taylor.

CLOHESY, WILLIAM. Last seen in Chicago about June 30, 1918. Worked at odd jobs in southern part of that city for a number of years. It will be greatly to his advantage to communicate with me.—Address FRANK KEARNEY, 2708 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MORNINGSTAR, RICHARD. "Dick." Was plasterer and contractor. Last heard of as having died from an accident somewhere in Oklahoma about nine years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHARLES H. MORNINGSTAR, Box 582, Dallas, Texas.

RUSSELL, JOHN L. "Jack." Once lived on Carruth St., Dorchester, Mass. Moved to Chicago, Ill., in 1914 or 1915. Moved back to Dorchester within a year. Last heard from in Pasadena, Calif. Any information will be appreciated by his old chum.—Address CHARLES B. MOSELEY, JR., Suite 17, 526 Newbury St., Boston, Mass.

DRISCOLL, JOHN JOSEPH. Husband. Left home at 25 East 31st St., New York City, March 13, 1918. Believed to have enlisted under assumed name. Left his wife and three children. Five feet eight inches tall, brown hair, blue eyes, weighed 156 pounds. He worked for the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company for ten years. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MARCELLA MARIE DRISCOLL, 258 Fifth Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

BAUGHMAN, GUY. Brother. Left home in November, eight years ago. Last heard of in February of the following year when he was at a logging camp at Oakville, Washington. Thirty-four years old, about five feet nine inches tall and weighed about 165 pounds at that time. A plasterer by trade. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address MRS. H. E. BERGER, 281 West Market St., Akron, Ohio.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-November or First December issues of *Adventure*. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine:

AIKINS, Walter J.; Beaubier, Jerry E.; Bunker, Earl R.; Burkett, Sgt. Major; Conkle, Clarence; Conners, Will F. W.; Cuthbert, Clarence; De Lapp, Will L.; Drumm-Jones, Charles J.; Edwards, Gilbert B.; Geho, Pvt. David W.; Hayes, Arthur Joseph; Hewke, Manda; Holder, Charles Henry; Howard, R. L.; Kuller, Harry; Marchmonte, Merle; McFadden, Paul; Reed, Elswine E. or Geo. C.; Rohrich, Arthur; Rubenstein, Harry; Santry, Denis; Seay, Philip; Sheldon, Willis D.; Thomas, John W.; Trask, Sam; Vertais, Marino; Wilkins, Norman Glenn; Wooten, George.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chrisholm; Wm. S. Hilles; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; J. P. Goggins; Ellsbets Murphy.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by *Adventure* for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALLISON, CORP. JAMES T.; Babcock, Lucius A.; Beaton, G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bryson, Clarence F.; Mr. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; Carr, Fred; Casey, H. E.; Coles, Bobby; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Engleby, B.; Garson, Ed.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Hines, Joseph; Kelly, Charles Lester; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisery, Jack; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Dr. William R.; Leighton, Capt.; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Nichols, Leon; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Parrott, D. C.; Reid, Raymond D.; Rich, Rob; Rodgers, Stewart; Rundle, Merrill G.; Scott, James F.; Shepard, H. O.; Swan, George F.; Taylor, Jim; Tripp, Edward; Van Tyler, Chester; Wetherell, Corp. D. E.; Williams, Raymond J.; Williams, W. P.; Wood, Basil D.; S 177284, 439; L. T. 348; J. C. H.; W. S.-X. V.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure*.

The Old Way

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Two Ways of Selling the OLIVER Typewriter

The New Way

Factory

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The New Way Saves You $43

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THE NEW WAY: **We ship from the factory to you, eliminating all wastes. This saves the $43, and it now goes to you. A $100 Oliver costs you but $57. Why waste $43 by buying typewriters the old way?**

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Note that this advertisement is signed by The Oliver Typewriter Company itself. It is not the advertisement of a concern offering second-hand or rebuilt Olivers of an earlier model. The Oliver Typewriter Company makes only new machines.

The old way, as explained above, was wasteful and wrong. So people have welcomed our new economical plan and our output has multiplied.

We offer for $57 the exact machine which formerly sold at $100. This is our Model Nine, the finest typewriter we ever built. It has the universal keyboard, so any stenographer may turn to it without the slightest hesitation and do better work more easily.

And it has dozens of superiorities not found elsewhere. For instance, it has far fewer parts. This means longer wear, and naturally few or no repairs.

This Oliver Nine is a 20-year development. If any typewriter is worth $100, it is this splendid model.

It is the same machine used by great concerns such as United States Steel Corporation, Baldwin Locomotive Works, National City Bank of New York, Pennsylvania Railroad, Otis Elevator Company and hosts of others. Such concerns demand the best. Yet they are not wasteful.

FREE TRIAL

Merely clip the coupon below, asking us to send a free trial Oliver. We do not ask a penny down. When the Oliver arrives, try it out. Put it to every test. Compare its workmanship.

Then, when you are convinced that the Oliver Nine is all we claim, and you prefer it, pay us at the rate of $3 per month.

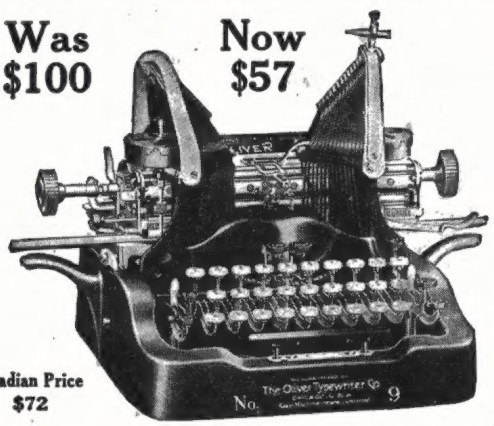
During the free trial, you are not under the slightest obligation to buy. If you wish to return it, we even refund the out-going transportation charges.

Used typewriters accepted in exchange at a fair valuation.

Or, if you would rather know more about our plans before ordering a free-trial Oliver, check the coupon for our amazing book entitled, "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy." We accompany it with our beautifully illustrated catalog describing the Oliver Nine.

Was $100

Now $57



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This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

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City..... State.....

Occupation or Business.....